

THE BIG FINISH MAGAZINE

# VORTEX

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THE FIRST

# QUESTION

THE UNIVERSE HAS FORGOTTEN THE DOCTOR, OR SO THE DOCTOR HOPES.

TORCHWOOD

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# UNIT: ERAS

**HUMANITY'S FIRST** and best line of defence against a hostile universe returns in a new series this spring. **UNIT Eras** will highlight heroes from across the history of the organisation, beginning with a four-episode anthology, *Hostile Universe*.

The box set comprises brand-new adventures starring Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart (Jon Culshaw), his daughter Kate Stewart (Jemma Redgrave), Osgood (Ingrid Oliver), Sarah Jane Smith (Sadie Miller) and Harry Sullivan (Christopher Naylor).

*Hostile Universe* also marks the Big Finish debut of Colonel Mace (Rupert Holliday-Evans) from 2008 **Doctor Who** story *The Sontaran Stratagem/The Poison Sky* as well as the first Big Finish audio episode set during the Fifteenth Doctor's era of the show. Melanie Bush (Bonnie Langford) and the Vlinx (Nicholas Briggs) also feature as UNIT's skyscraper headquarters is sent into lockdown.

The four episodes in this set are: *Rise of the Valiant* by Andrew Smith; *The Indigo Child* by Ken Bentley; *The Life and Death of Private Eddie Wise* by Hannah Kennedy; and *Deadstar* by Joshua Pruett and Jonathan S Powell.

Producer Heather Challands says: "I was thrilled by the opportunity to delve deeper into times when the TARDIS isn't around and the Doctor's friends simply have to do the best that they can against impossible odds. This new **UNIT** range is an anthology series with each story standing alone, going from the 1970s right up to the 2020s to see how much UNIT has changed in its long history." **VORTEX**

## UNIT: ERAS HOSTILE UNIVERSE

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# EDITORIAL

**FEBRUARY ALREADY**, how did that happen?! 2026 brings a new beginning for the Eleventh Doctor range with a fantastic new artist wearing the bow tie and tweeds. Miles Taylor steps into the threads to portray the part originated on television by Matt Smith.

I had a great conversation with Miles recently – included in this issue – and was blown away by just how good he is. When he switches from his usual conversational voice into those instantly recognisable tones of the Eleventh Doctor, it's absolutely uncanny.

Big Finish recasts are always done sensitively and with a lot of thought, and we've had amazing successes in the past with Elliot Chapman as Ben Jackson, Tim Treloar as the Third Doctor, Jonathon Carley as the War Doctor and Jacob Dudman as the Eleventh Doctor. And as Michael Troughton and Stephen Noonan continue to play the first two Doctors with aplomb, it's reassuring to know their future incarnation is in safe hands!

I'm excited to hear just where things will go next for the Eleventh Doctor, accompanied by his new companion Eleanor Fong (played by Jasmine Bayes). It's going to be an emotional ride for both Miles and the Doctor – I can already tell! **VORTEX**

*Kenny*

Big Finish would like to extend heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of actor Marcus Gilbert who sadly passed away in January.

THERE'S A NEW MAN  
DONNING THE BOW TIE  
AND FEZ IN THE ELEVENTH  
DOCTOR ADVENTURES...



# NEW DOCTOR... NEW DANGERS!

**THE ELEVENTH** Doctor is back with a new pair of hands at the helm, as Miles Taylor takes on the role in **The Eleventh Doctor Adventures: The First Question**.

Producer John Ainsworth says: "I'm very excited to be overseeing the new **The Eleventh Doctor Adventures**. Every Doctor's era has its own particular flavour and our aim is always to be as authentic as possible, in terms of style and tone, to what was seen in the television series. We've

been very successful in presenting brand-new stories that still have the familiar flavour of the Eleventh Doctor's previous adventures."

And the series has a new leading man, after Jacob Dudman's retirement from the part. Director Nicholas Briggs says: "We had quite a long audition process where we sent out audition pieces and asked several actors to do their favourite Eleventh Doctor speeches. They are all brilliant actors but none of them were a good enough match for

Matt Smith's very specific voice.

"We got to the stage where we thought maybe it would be best not to try for an exact match, but just find someone who would act the part brilliantly. Jacob is a tough act to follow because he'd not only been able to sound exactly like Matt, but he also gave a really good performance – full of heart and emotion – and adaptable to any situation.

"But then Max Kashevsky, who had been working on the new **The Eleventh Doctor Adventures** initially



Above (l-r), Jasmine Bayes and Miles Taylor

and who did a lot of the valuable groundwork on the stories and scripts, suggested Miles. We listened to his voice and quickly gathered that he had quite a fan reputation for doing a good impersonation of Matt.

"We knew nothing about Miles as an actor and a person so we asked him to record an audition. It was brilliant – lightning had struck again! Then we got him in for a second audition in studio to see how he coped with that and he was simply superb. I edited his audition and added sound design, and we played it to Jason Haigh-Ellery who thought Miles was great too. So, we offered Miles the role and he was delighted to accept. We are really thrilled."

**SPEAKING TO** *Vortex*, Miles says: "I'd like to say that it was a sudden revelation but I've been doing Matt's voice since 2010 in the playground! I used to run around being the Eleventh Doctor and imitating his voice, which I've always enjoyed.

## IT'S BEEN A LONG, LONG PROCESS WHICH STARTED AT THE AGE OF 10!

MILES TAYLOR

"I was a huge fan of *Dead Ringers* growing up. I used to come home from school, put Radio 4 on, and listen to Jon Culshaw. I've always loved impressionists so in terms of Matt's voice, it just kind of developed. I started by mimicking various bits to eventually thinking, 'Maybe I can refine this a bit more'. I was able to copy his vocal mannerisms and felt I could take it a bit further – and did my own fan projects, here and there, just to see if I could do the voice.

"Someone at Big Finish got to hear it and I was offered the chance to audition. I started listening to all of Matt's mannerisms and

vocal inflections – the way his voice rises and falls, that kind of thing. It's been a long, long process which started at the age of 10!"

Miles, who works in television post-production, is no stranger to Big Finish having been a devotee for most of his life. He explains: "I've been a fan of Big Finish since I was little and got *The Mutant Phase* with *Doctor Who Adventures* magazine. I am also an actual fan of Jacob's run as the Doctor and an



Above (l-r), Miles Taylor, Nicholas Briggs and Jasmine Bayes

avid listener to the series he, Safiyya Ingar and producer Alfie Shaw did.

"Being asked to audition for the Eleventh Doctor was a surprise, but it was an opportunity I could never have said no to as it was a huge honour and one that I really threw myself into. I did drama at school but Big Finish was really keen to make sure I passed a rigorous audition process, and I went through lots of different challenges with both little and large audition segments to start off with and a full-on audition script. I was then offered a drama workshop with Louise Jameson, who was amazing and such a joy. She was so lovely and gave me the most wonderful tips both about acting in general and also specific to audio drama. I gave it my all and thankfully, here we are!"

John concludes: "Miles is just brilliant as the Eleventh Doctor. Not only does he sound like him, but he has all the boundless energy and quirky mannerisms that distinguish this incarnation. We were very lucky to find Miles and

he is a delight to work with.”

Looking at the stories in the set, John says: “There’s a great variety across the three stories in this first box set. We start off in Hong Kong in the 1990s where we meet the Eleventh Doctor’s new companion, Eleanor Fong, played by Jasmine Bayes who is a great foil for the Doctor. The Doctor and Eleanor then travel to Space Florida – somewhere the Doctor has visited before – but it turns out not to be quite the fun holiday destination that the Doctor had hoped for. In the final

**THE CHARACTER REMAINS THE SAME AND IS ALWAYS FUN TO WRITE, BUT MILES IS TERRIFIC, HE ABSOLUTELY NAILS IT.**

LISA McMULLIN

East and West, past and future; I’m not sure there’s anywhere else quite like it. I’ve travelled around a fair bit of China and Hong Kong feels very distinct. I love it! It wasn’t actually my idea to set the adventure in Hong Kong so it was fortuitous that I’d been there!

“It’s a story about memory and how we are the product of our past experiences – even if those experiences aren’t great. Would you choose to rid yourself of a terrible memory to give yourself peace of mind, even if that meant



Above (l-r): Tuyen Do, Jasmine Bayes, Miles Taylor, Dan Li and Windson Liang

story, the TARDIS takes the Doctor and Eleanor back in time to Salem during the notorious witch trials.”

**THE FIRST** adventure is *The Final Cut* by Lisa McMullin from a story by Max. Lisa says:

“Eleanor’s the CEO of a multinational so whip-smart and authoritative. She’s used to giving orders and being the boss. But she’s got a strong moral core and sense of responsibility – just the kind of

person the Doctor needs on his team. *The Final Cut* sees her whole purpose in life stripped away from her. She discovers her past isn’t at all what she thought it was, and so her future is suddenly blown wide open. She’s about to go on the most extraordinary ‘gap year’ while she takes stock.”

Has Lisa ever been to the story’s setting, Hong Kong? Lisa confirms: “Yes, I have! It’s an extraordinary place – a glorious explosion of

losing a piece of yourself?”

“I love writing/listening/watching the knottiness of a new companion and Doctor first figuring each other out – that back and forth as they decide whether they like each other or not. It’s always a bit delicious. I write for the character not the actor so I wrote the Eleventh Doctor as I would write him whether he were played by Jacob, Matt or Miles. The character remains the same and is always fun to write, but Miles is



Above: Jasmine Bayes

terrific, he absolutely nails it.” Nick adds: “*The Final Cut* was from an idea by Max but after he left, Lisa was handed the reins. I can’t speak highly enough about her professionalism and dedication. She absolutely has storytelling nailed, and her modern sensibility really adds a New **Who** zest to everything she writes. Lisa was perfect for this and built the character of Eleanor beautifully. Even now, during the post-production, I’m spotting things that Lisa did in the script and thinking, ‘That’s really clever and just right!’”

**ON CASTING** Jasmine as Eleanor, Nick says: “Max made several suggestions of actors, so I listened to their voice clips and we also brought some other actors into the mix. John Ainsworth and I narrowed it down to two actors who we thought could be right and we auditioned them both with Miles so we could get his input too. And we all agreed that Jasmine just had the edge, which I was particularly pleased about as when I initially

## THE TOURIST TRAP RATHER REMINDS ME OF THE ARK IN SPACE PART ONE...

NICHOLAS BRIGGS

listened to the clips of Max’s suggestions, she was the one who had shone out for me. Jasmine was great in the audition and even better in the studio. She and Miles really hit it off and are quite the team working together.”

*The Tourist Trap* by Beth Axford is the second tale in the set.

“Beth’s *The Tourist Trap* rather reminds me of *The Ark in Space* part one,” says Nick, “in that it’s the perfect kind of tale to introduce us to the character dynamics of the Doctor and his companion. It’s essentially a two-hander, with a guest computer, and harks back to the TV episode *The Beast Below* in all the best ways. Packed full of lovely character stuff and exciting near-death situations.”

**A DELUSION** of *Witches* by Lisa concludes the set, where the TARDIS arrives at the Salem witch trials in 1692. Lisa recalls when she first heard about the trials. She tells *Vortex*: “It must have been at school. I remember studying *The Crucible* and I think that would have been the first time I really encountered them. I visited Salem in February 2025; it’s an interesting place. The memorial to those who died is very moving, and the house where one of the judges lived is full of fascinating history – there’s also a great museum. But then alongside that every other shop is a ‘witches’ emporium’ selling pseudo spells and tacky t-shirts – I had mixed feelings about those!

“*A Delusion of Witches* is a courtroom drama that uses real events and real historical figures to draw comparisons with current events. Anything Arthur Miller can do, I can do... not better but certainly shorter, ha ha! It’s a shouty, feminist, angry play about the ‘othering’ of people and then persecuting them for their ‘otherness’. It’s got some jokes in it but listen for the outrage!

“Ever since I first read *The Crucible* I’ve found it fascinating and awful. It happened everywhere and it’s still happening. Gaslighting, humiliating, exposing, killing groups of always vulnerable people because of shady ulterior motives or prejudices. I am permanently furious at the human race.” **VORTEX**

### THE ELEVENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES THE FIRST QUESTION



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THE FIFTH BIG FINISH ADVENTURE FOR THE THIRTEENTH DOCTOR AND YAZ BRINGS THEM BACK TO BRITAIN...

# VIOLET HOUR

**JODIE WHITTAKER** and Mandip Gill travel to the past for their latest adventure as the Doctor and Yaz arrive in the East End of London, 1926. *The Violet Hour* is the first **Doctor Who** script from Rafaella Marcus, who has previously written the **Torchwood** script *The Last Love Song of Suzie Costello*.

Producer Noga Flaishon says: "Working with Rafaella was wonderful. I adore their work across theatre and audio (if you haven't listened to *Thrice Forgotten*, what are you doing?!), and they were amongst the first writers I pitched for this series.

"The plot is so suspenseful and spooky, and this was the

first (and so far only time) I shed tears in the control room during a recording... the words ripped my heart out on this one."

*Vortex* asks Rafaella how they came to be involved with the series? Rafaella says: "Lots of paths converging!

My background is in theatre and I first met Noga, who produces **The Thirteenth Doctor Adventures**, when we met to talk about one of her plays. I weirdly then ran a drama school workshop on writing for audio where she was one of the students – obviously she felt I wasn't talking total rubbish as she later asked me to be one of the writers for the series."

How exciting was it to be asked to write a **Doctor Who** adventure for

Jodie and Mandip? Rafaella admits: "I couldn't say yes fast enough! Are you kidding? It's always exciting to be asked to contribute something to the world of **Doctor Who**, but to write for the first female Doctor and the first female Doctor/companion pairing is iconic. I've grown up with **Doctor Who** since the 2005 revival and, like all the greatest sci-fi, the flexibility of the storytelling has always taken my breath away. It really can be anything and go anywhere, so long as we deeply care about our core characters.

"The Doctor and companion(s) are our still point and the universe moves around them. And with the Thirteenth Doctor and Yaz, like all the best Doctor/companion





Above: Mandip Gill

pairings in my opinion, there's a really troubled undertow to how much they love each other – because it can never work, right?"

**RAFAELLA'S BRIEF** for the story from Noga and script editor Matt Fitton was open. Rafaella explains: "It was generously broad. This episode has a bit more of the ongoing story in it because – without spoilers – there's a pretty perfect narrative opportunity for it. Beyond that, the tone, setting, action etc. are all mine (unless you hate it, then it was all Noga and Matt...!)."

"The TARDIS Team goes gaslight. The 1920s but definitely not roaring – eerie whispering is probably more accurate. The London underbelly of East End music hall culture and that time period's absolute obsession with speaking to the dead through mediums, weird science experiments and 'piercing the veil'. It's also a story about sisters and memory and loss. Feel free to imagine velvet drapes, flickering lights and the River Thames at night."

Rafaella adds: "Getting to be present at the recording was

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GOES GASLIGHT.  
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RAFAELLA MARCUS

fantastic, especially because I couldn't make it to the studio for my previous Big Finish audio. There's something amazing about knowing that most of your job is done – you get to sit back and enjoy the sheer talent of everyone else doing theirs. You don't really know if you've succeeded with a character's voice until you hear it out loud, so listening to Jodie be so playful, animated and sharp

was both a treat and a massive relief.

"I also have to mention that Olivia Marcus, the actor who plays one of the new roles in the episode, is actually my sister. It was a complete coincidence (I didn't know until the day before recording) but it brought an extra special aspect to a story that is very much about sisters. She's brilliant, but then I would say that (though really, she is!)."

Director Ken Bentley adds: "Jodie and Mandip are just the easiest people to work with. They enjoy being together so much that they bring their own energy into the studio and infect everybody else. It's always a huge amount of fun and they're both completely on top of what they're doing, which is a joy for the director!"

"The cast were all terrific. I'd worked with David Robb before and I knew he'd have fun playing Maltravers. Joseph Arkley was recommended by Jodie and I could tell he enjoyed getting his teeth into Kidney. And Liv Andrusier was amazing, she stepped in at the very last minute to play Esther and really hit the ground running.

"It's quite an emotional play compared to the adventures we normally make and everyone threw themselves into the tragic journey of their characters. That's the thing I always find jaw-dropping about actors, they can just pop in for a day and bring to life such gripping and emotional storytelling. One of the infinite privileges of being a director is being able to sit back and hear actors being brilliant." **VORTEX**

**THE THIRTEENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES  
THE VIOLET HOUR**



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ANNEKE WILLS RETURNS TO HER SWINGING SIXTIES ROLE, ALONGSIDE THE FIRST DOCTOR...

# GOOD GOLLY MISS POLLY!

**WHEN THE** *Doctor's former companion Polly sets off to investigate a fantastic new net-zero city, nothing goes quite according to plan.*

Anneke Wills is back as Polly, with Stephen Noonan as the Doctor and Lauren Cornelius as Dodo in **The First Doctor Adventures: Beware the City of Illusions**. Writer/director Nicholas Briggs says: "I introduced the idea to producer Mark Wright that I wanted to do a sequence of stories where our First Doctor meets some of his old companions, but at an older age. Although our audience is very generous in willingly suspending their disbelief about actors sounding older now, I thought

it would take some of the strain off of some of the actors not to have to try to sound several decades younger.

"But I also thought that it would be interesting to investigate how those companions would react to meeting the Doctor again after many years; we could explore what kind of impact they'd had on his life. It worked out brilliantly with Vicki and Steven, and I always had it in mind for us to work with Anneke as Polly again.

"Anneke and I chatted on the phone at length and I asked her to tell me what she would like the story to be about, how she saw Polly in the later years of her life. Anneke outlined exactly what she thought Polly should be caught up

in, fighting for environmental issues, so I went away and wrote a detailed storyline, which I printed and posted to Anneke as she doesn't use the internet. She phoned me up and was incredibly enthusiastic about it. I said, 'Well, you told me what you wanted, so that's what I wrote!'"

*Vortex* asks Nick to sum up the story. Nick admits: "It's difficult to know how best to tease the story because it's about so many things. On one level, it's about two strong women with a mutual secret who decide to put a plan together to overcome a terrible threat to the planet.

"On another level, it explores the notion that an alien invasion might not be a grand, military affair with



Above: Anneke Wills

monstrous creatures craving our natural resources or wanting to subjugate the human race. What if it were just about sordid little deals, where the human race is seen simply as a commodity?

"It's also designed as a creepy, scary adventure that has all the classic elements of all the great **Doctor Who** stories I love. Scary bits, mysterious bits, exciting bits and monsters! But most of all, things turning out not to be quite how they initially appear."

**MARK IS** the series producer and says that when he started:

"It was a blank canvas really, aside from knowing we were doing adventures with Dodo post *The Savages*. I like that we got to bed in with some lovely standalone stories in the first two box sets to help Stephen and Lauren settle into the roles, which they did so brilliantly."

"I think it was wholly appropriate that we created something to honour the work of the original companion actors, but also to look at where they ended up and how they're faring in these later years. For Maureen O'Brien, Peter Purves and now Anneke to come back and display that breadth of experience and maturity, and the lives they've lived – and channel that into a



Above (l-r): Stephen Noonan and Lauren Cornelius

fantastic performance. It's always great to hear these **Doctor Who** legends recapture the past, but this feels like something different. The results have been spectacular.

"Studio days are the best part of this job, and that hasn't changed since my first day in 1999 (albeit as a visiting journalist back then). There's a dedication to getting the work done, but also to have fun while doing it. As a producer, I have the easy bit on studio days, sitting at the back hearing everybody perform, keeping an eye on the script pages and interviewing our ensemble. It's the actors, Nick as director and the studio engineer who put the hard graft in. Stephen and Lauren are a joy together and when

you add in the guest cast, it's lovely."

Of this cast, Nick says: "I leaned into using some of my old favourites for this story. Displaying his startling versatility is Barnaby Edwards playing three hugely different characters. Barney is a good friend of Anneke's so I knew she'd find him a reassuring presence – as indeed do I. Barney's playing a real smoothy who thinks he can solve the world's problems, as long as he's the saviour. Then he plays a ghastly alien with a horribly thoughtless agenda. And he also plays a gigantic, tragic monster with a surprising twist!"

"One of my other favourite actors at the moment is Anna Crichow

## I HAVE THE EASY BIT ON STUDIO DAYS, SITTING AT THE BACK HEARING EVERYBODY PERFORM...

MARK WRIGHT

and she plays Lillian Maggs, Polly's trusted assistant. Then there's Tom Alexander who can turn his voice to anything, and does a great job here as Dave Reese who the Doctor takes an amusing objection to. He very much has his roots in a character like Scorby from *The Seeds of Doom*. Plus there's Becky Wright, another actor who can play many different characters and I've wanted to work with Amy Rockson for ages, so it was good to get her in as a self-serving politician. They were a great team." **VORTEX**

### THE FIRST DOCTOR ADVENTURES BEWARE THE CITY OF ILLUSIONS



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WITH DOCTOR WHO'S 13TH SEASON RECENTLY RELEASED ON  
BLU-RAY, BIG FINISH HEADS BACK TO 1975 TO ENHANCE THE PERIOD...

# 70s THROWBACK

**TOM BAKER** returns for his 15<sup>th</sup> series of Big Finish audios, with a stellar companion line-up. In the first of the Fourth Doctor's 2026 sets, *The Ministry of Death*, the Doctor and Sarah (Sadie Miller) are brought back down to Earth where they help out the Brigadier (Jon Culshaw) and Harry Sullivan (Christopher Naylor) with two tricky cases.

We've previously joined the Doctor, Sarah and Harry in a handful of **Lost Stories**, including *Doctor Who*:

*The Ark, Return of the Cybermen and Daleks! Genesis of Terror*, but this box set features the first original adventures with the trio alongside their old friend from UNIT, Brigadier Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart.

*Summoned back to Earth by the Space-Time telegraph, the Doctor and Sarah Jane find themselves assisting their UNIT colleagues not once but twice. But exactly how willing will the Time Lord be to be stuck in a single place once more?*

Producer David Richardson

says: "Now this is my era! I was 12 years old when the Fourth Doctor, Sarah Jane and Harry were flying out into the universe, and those years remain some of my most treasured **Doctor Who** memories.

"How brilliant that, at last, 15 seasons into **The Fourth Doctor Adventures**, we can bring these characters back together again for new stories. This season has been sitting in the can for a while now – we made it at the height of lockdown – and it proved the most



Above: Tom Baker

joyous diversion from bleak times. Imaginative, brilliant escapism – just what **Doctor Who** should be.”

**THIS RELEASE** opens with the four-part adventure *The Ministry of Death* written by Robert Valentine.

*An electronics expert has died after being struck by lightning. But how could this possibly happen in his office? And that's only the first death they discover. A wild scheme is underway. A case of twisted science and revenge. That's about to hit closer to home than they could possibly anticipate.*

Rob says: “As far as I’m concerned, getting to write a **Doctor Who** story for Tom Baker is the best thing that can possibly happen to you. It’s a joy, it’s a miracle and the time spent writing it was one of my most enjoyable experiences with Big Finish. If I recall correctly, the brief was to write a TV Season 13 story for the Doctor, Sarah, Harry and the Brig. Beyond that, the sky was my limit.”

How did Rob feel about being

**TRYING TO COME UP WITH VARIOUS INTERESTING AND APPROPRIATE WAYS TO BUMP OFF A GROUP OF SCIENTISTS.**

ROBERT VALENTINE

given these iconic characters?

Rob tells *Vortex*: “Being given these four characters was huge fun, but it also meant I had to come up with a story that would incorporate them all and their various skill sets in a way that felt organic and necessary.”

The Fourth Doctor and Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart have a very

different relationship to the Third Doctor and the UNIT commander in chief, which Rob enjoyed exploring.

He explains: “The Fourth Doctor is even more keen to get away from UNIT than the Third Doctor was, and because he’s so much more anarchic, the Brig really has his work cut out for him. But I adore their relationship in *Terror of the Zygons* and that was a really useful touchstone for this one.

“In the same way that other Hinchliffe-era stories reference horror movies and literature, this one channels *The Abominable Doctor Phibes* and *Theatre of Blood*, both of which star Vincent Price as a crazed villain who commits strings of themed murders. In *The Ministry of Death*, a twisted genius wages a campaign of vengeance against the team of scientists she blames for her tragic situation, and it’s up to the Doctor, Sarah, Harry and the Brig to stop her.

“The challenges in this story were all part of the fun, i.e., trying to come up with various interesting and appropriate ways to bump off a group of scientists. All part of a day’s work when you’re writing **Doctor Who**, really!”

Rob adds: “The whole project was a highlight. To give you a sense of time frames, I had to take a break from this story to write *The End of the Beginning*, and all the while I was working on it, I really didn’t want it to end.”

**THE SECOND** adventure in the set is the two-part tale *The Inhuman Empire* by Phil Mulryne.

*Sarah is contacted by an old friend who knows her predilection for ‘rum goings on’, asking her to investigate unusual activities at the National Museum. Sarah agrees to look into it, with the Doctor tagging along – but they soon discover things are worse than they thought. Because the Museum is host to alien activity – very familiar aliens at that. And if they don’t stop these relic hunters quickly, then humanity itself might not survive.*

Phil admits to getting a thrill when an email comes through to say, ‘Would you like to write another script for Tom Baker?’

Phil says: “It is, of course, a joy and a privilege being asked to write a script for Tom’s Doctor! And this one felt really special as it was getting



Above: Sadie Miller

to write the Doctor alongside the Brigadier, Sarah and Harry. That's such a joyful mix of great companions to get to play with!

"I knew I'd be following Rob's story where the Doctor was temporarily back on Earth with UNIT. And we knew we were aiming at a Season 13 sort of vibe – which is an amazing era of the show to be asked to fit in with. We then had a bit of back and forth about the potential threat the Doctor could be facing, but I was left gloriously free to come up with whatever ideas, settings, characters and plot I wanted to pitch.

"There's something strange going on at the National Museum, where archaeologist Carson Baylis is putting together an exhibition of stunning artefacts from the ancient

near east. He's being incredibly secretive about it all and an old family friend of Sarah's, now a curator at the museum, gets in touch to see if Sarah can take a look into things.

"Of course, the Doctor gets involved too and they find that the artefacts sitting at the heart of Baylis's exhibition create an existential threat to the Earth which the Doctor and UNIT have to counter..."

*The Inhuman Empire* as a title catches the imagination – how does Phil enjoy coming up with names for his *Doctor Who* scripts?

Phil explains: "Sometimes the titles come quickly, sometimes it's a case of brainstorming dozens of different options. With this one there was a working title, but none of us really loved it. So then I did lots of thinking, running through endless options around 'treasures', 'museums', 'death', 'empires' etc., before I finally suggested the one we went with."

Phil concludes: "It's just a delight getting to write for this team and this era. You've got UNIT. You've got horrific monsters and threats. But you've also got lots of comedy and warmth.

"Sarah Jane's so bright and brave. The Brigadier's utterly dependable and wonderfully straightforward and British – which can be infuriating or comic depending on what you want. His relationship with the Doctor's just lovely and warm and trusting by this stage, even when they drive each other nuts. And Harry is also brave, smart, very British – the potential butt of lots of jokes but also a true hero." **VORTEX**

**YOU'VE GOT UNIT. YOU'VE GOT HORRIFIC MONSTERS AND THREATS. BUT YOU'VE ALSO GOT LOTS OF COMEDY AND WARMTH.**

PHIL MULRYNE

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# BOOK CLUB

EVERY MONTH THE BIG FINISH BOOK CLUB SPOTLIGHTS A RELEASE FROM THE BIG FINISH CATALOGUE, WITH A SPECIAL DISCOUNT ON THE DIGITAL DOWNLOAD PRICE.

## THE COMPANION CHRONICLES HOME TRUTHS



**OF ALL** of the Doctor's friends to feature in **The Companion Chronicles** range, perhaps Sara Kingdom wasn't the most obvious.

Producer David Richardson says:

"*Home Truths* was the result of my desire to bring back Jean Marsh as Sara Kingdom – not an easy task, as the character faded to dust at the end of *The Daleks' Master Plan* in 1966 when she joined the First Doctor and Steven in their battle with the Daleks. But Simon Guerrier came up with a very clever means of her resurrection,

and wrote a really special script."

Simon recalls: "David asked if I'd like to write a **Companion Chronicle** and listed which companions were available. The standard set-up, he explained, was having two stories happening at once: the companion as they are 'now', years after leaving the Doctor; and the story they're telling when they are still in the TARDIS.

"When David read out the list of companions, he mentioned Jean Marsh who'd already worked with Big Finish – and said she wouldn't fit this model. I then said we could make it work if the story she told explained how she could be telling it. And David commissioned me there and then!

"Having suggested the basic set up, I scribbled a few more fleshed-out ideas. Since it was going to be a ghost story of some kind, I reread some scary stories and tried to think of sci-fi twists on fairy tales. One idea was a haunted house at Christmas that granted wishes.

"But script editor Alan Barnes noted that the Christmas idea was too similar to Robert Shearman's *The Chimes of Midnight* – and I could only lose any contest with that. So, he suggested the house be more science fiction, an 'Ideal Home' exhibit of the future. And that was brilliant, because playing up the contrast of the hi-tech house and the low-tech fireside where Sara tells the story gave the thing a really good atmosphere."

**HOME TRUTHS** places the First Doctor, Steven and Sara in unfamiliar territory, a killer house, full of death, with Simon

admitting he was deliberately taking them out of their comfort zones:

"It's a horror story in the tradition of MR James. I told director Lisa Bowerman that I wanted the eerie feel of those old BBC Christmas adaptations, less about blood and guts and more about unsettling ideas that remain with the listener long after."

"When we recorded *Home Truths*," David recalls. "Jean came into the studio clearly not knowing what to expect – she'd left this character behind four decades ago. But by the time of the sequel, *The Drowned World*, she was very enthusiastic and loving it."

Lisa says: "I love *Home Truths*. I think that has to do with the fact that it works not only as a piece of sci-fi but also as solid drama and a ghost story. The setting and the framing are particularly effective in the audio medium." And Simon concludes: "I wasn't able to make the recording of *Home Truths* because I was at a family wedding; Lisa texted me to say it had gone really well. The story was recorded only a few months before it was released so I didn't have long to wait to hear the result. I couldn't be happier." **VORTEX**

### THE COMPANION CHRONICLES HOME TRUTHS



■ RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2008  
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WILL THIS BE THE LAST BATTLEFIELD FOR  
THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY UNIT TEAM?



# THE KNIGHT MANAGER

**DIMENSIONAL RIFTS** are, as a rule, trouble. They so rarely lead to alien worlds populated by serene swans or cheery chipmunks! Brigadier Winifred Bambera (Angela Bruce), Sergeant Jean-Paul Savarin (Alex Jordan) and Dr Louise Rix (Yemisi Oyinloye) had a tough old time at the conclusion of the **UNIT: Brave New World** box set, where rifts led to them facing threats including a giant monster on the Yorkshire moors and parallel universe versions of themselves.

And now, in the next **UNIT: Brave New World** box set, *Knighthall*, another rift has opened leading to Camelot and the return of Bambera's now-husband, the knight Ancelyn

(Marcus Gilbert). But this isn't a peaceful reunion as UNIT must venture into Camelot to deal with the threat of the vicious Queen Guinevere (Genevieve Gaunt).

Producer Alfie Shaw says: "The series has been building to Ancelyn ever since it started and it's great to end my run on UNIT by bringing him back. Script editor Robert Valentine and I knew when we were planning the two sets that we had to finish with this.

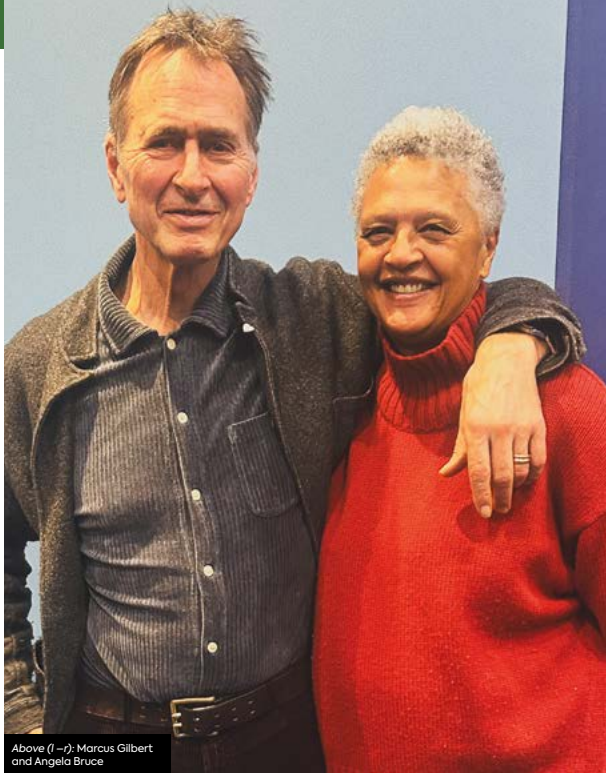
"*Knighthall* follows on directly from *Fractures*, with the two sets essentially forming one really bad week for UNIT! It started with a Kaiju attack and now they've been thrown into the midst of an inter-dimensional Cold War. We

finally go to the Albion referenced in the television episode *Battlefield* and explore how it's changed after losing both Arthur and Merlin."

Rob says: "From the moment we started dreaming up ideas for Bambera's adventures, we always knew we wanted Ancelyn to return, but only once Bambera seemed resigned to never seeing him again. From the very first story in the **UNIT: Brave New World** series, Bambera has been set up as having an Ancelyn-shaped hole in her life, so this story is the fruition of a very long game."

*Deep Water* by Georgia Cook opens the set. Georgia says: "It was so exciting to write for Bambera and Ancelyn! I have a proper soft spot for





Above (l-r): Marcus Gilbert  
and Angela Bruce

this pair and it was a delight to explore how they might be doing after we learned of their split in *Fractures*.

"They're such a beautiful clash and melding of personalities. Bambera pragmatic and realistic, seemingly without romance at first glance, and Ancelyn, the romantic ideal of an Arthurian Knight. On paper they shouldn't even get on (and it makes their bickering so much fun in *Battlefield*) and yet they love one another dearly.

"*Battlefield* is one of my favourite Seventh Doctor stories. In fact, it was the first classic **Doctor Who** story I ever watched so repeat viewings for this script was not a hardship!"

Georgia adds: "My partner is a huge fan of Arthurian legend so it was great getting to consult with him on certain characters and themes. Hopefully it means some fun inclusions for lore-aficionados!"

**THE STAKES** continue to rise in *Storm over Albion* by Felicia Barker. Felicia says: "The dynamic between Bambera and Ancelyn fell into place straight away.

## THEY'RE SUCH A BEAUTIFUL CLASH AND MELDING OF PERSONALITIES.

GEORGIA COOK

Much of what I got down first was their interactions which flowed beautifully. And having Arawn as an antagonist-cum-ally was part of my pitch for the story so I had a clear idea of what I wanted to do with him.

"The biggest challenge, but also the most fun, was defining Guinevere, knowing she was going to be important to the finale and having a lot of depth to convey in a short time. I got some of the way there by taking inspiration from Galadriel in the 'mirror' scene of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, but it really clicked when I found her connection to Savarin."

Talking of the script, Felicia tells *Vortex*: "It's about a clash of traditions. Literal universes are smashing together, UNIT are breaking into

Albion, Guinevere is locking up potential allies, the court are at odds with the populace, and Bambera and Ancelyn are in desperate need of some marriage counselling. All of these things are the same thing really – people from different worlds being thrown around by outside forces and blaming one another, because they don't quite see where each other is coming from. Some of them will find reconciliation. Some of them will fracture in dramatic fashion!

"I was at the recording and the cast were not only incredible actors (Genevieve Gaunt was exactly the Guinevere I heard in my head) but they are all lovely people. Angela Bruce is an absolute riot."

*Shining Armour* by Robert Valentine concludes this set. Rob says: "This whole box set is a direct sequel to the Seventh Doctor story *Battlefield* in which Bambera and Ancelyn's worlds collide again. Except this time, not only do Arthurian knights come to our world, but UNIT also goes to Camelot!

"I'm a sucker for a love story, and so getting to write for Bambera and Ancelyn has been a dream. Bambera's great tension has always been about love vs duty, and now that tension is being fully explored. Will they? Won't they? Listen and find out!

"My highlight this time around was getting to reunite Bambera and Ancelyn, and basically getting to tell a big, old-fashioned romantic adventure story. There are knights in shining armour, dragons on the streets of London and the slimmest of slim chances that our heroes might earn themselves a happy ending." **VORTEX**

### UNIT: BRAVE NEW WORLD KNIGHTFALL



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TORCHWOOD IS PAYING  
A FINAL TRIBUTE TO ITS  
MYSTERIOUS ARCH FOE...



# BRINGING IN THE CURTAIN

**THE SAD** passing of Murray Melvin in 2023 deprived the acting industry of one of its greats – and Big Finish one of its most popular characters. Since playing Bilis Manger in **Torchwood** on television, the veteran actor returned to the part on numerous occasions on audio.

Producer James Goss says: “We were all plunged into deep despair by the passing of Murray. The one sad thing about Big Finish is working with wonderful actors who you think will go on forever and then, when they don’t, it hits you hard.

“Murray had the most magnificent memorial service. A giant 20-foot-high banner of him looked down on us all while a gospel choir sang and there was even – genuinely – a

rap. He had such a wide circle of people who were devoted to him.”

Big Finish wanted to pay its respects to the beloved performer. James says: “David Llewellyn came up with a brilliant way to pay tribute to both Bilis Manger and Murray without recasting; the result is *Curtain*.

“*Curtain* is in the grand tradition of David’s Bilis stories – essentially an Amicus film but audio drama – fans of the genre will know what to expect. Three more or less ghastly people are summoned by a mysterious figure and hilarity ensues. In this case, it’s three actors who return to a theatre in Swansea which burnt down long ago. How was *Torchwood* involved? Who is the character claiming to be Bilis? And what’s trapped inside

the statue of the Swansea Devil?”

“Bilis forces our trio to re-enact the play they staged on the night the theatre burned down, and we discover that each of them has been hiding a secret. And now it’s all coming out. Unfortunately, the play is a version of *Dr Faustus*, and we all know that that ends with the Devil coming out of Hell for his prize...”

The concept of *Curtain* was drafted by David but, as James explains: “Sadly, a period of ill-health meant that David wasn’t able to finish the script so Tim Foley and I had a riot developing something which pays tribute to all the mad old actors who’ve been in a Big Finish or David’s worked with in his theatrical career.”



Above (l-r): Sarah Douglas, Cyril Nri, Colin Ryan and Robert Bathurst

**THE GUEST** cast includes Robert Bathurst from *Toast* and Sarah Douglas from *Superman II*. James adds: "They're fighting the Devil. What's not to love?! It's very true to **Torchwood** in that it's dark, it's nasty and it's also very cheeky. Hopefully it's a fitting send off for Bilis."

Director Scott Handcock continues: "Like a lot of **Torchwood** scripts over the years, the guest parts are gifts for the director and actors, and *Curtain* is no exception. There's always an extra layer of fun when your actors are playing actors, because they get to channel the worst parts of themselves and exaggerate certain characteristics.

"And while the characters in this piece are slightly arch and heightened stereotypes, there's also the typical heart, truth and emotion you come to expect from **Torchwood** releases."

"I've known Sarah for years and she's been in various Big Finish productions in a variety of roles, so I knew she'd capture both the campness and emotion of the piece. Cyril Nri is someone I've loved as an actor for a long time and worked with very briefly on the **Class** audios, so it's a treat to actually work with him properly on something original and

create a new character from scratch.

"Robert I know has done a lot of Big Finish previously with **The Eighth Doctor Adventures**. He did a stint in *Casualty* last year playing a more villainous character, so I knew from people in Cardiff that he was not only delightful but you could throw anything at him. I was very pleased that we were able to offer the parts to these three huge personalities and they all ran with the challenges in the fun of the script."

Scott adds: "The fourth and most significant piece of casting in *Curtain* is Colin Ryan's character. Colin's brilliant; he's a really versatile actor. He's been in **Doctor Who** previously, but also does a lot of voice and theatre work. I saw him last year in *Little Shop of Horrors* where he was the lead in Sheffield, working with my good friend Wilf Scolding. I went to see Wilf but was mesmerised by Colin and just knew I had to get him in for something.

"Colin had worked with Murray before and I don't want to give too much away about Colin's character, but I needed someone I knew would be strong on audio, particularly against the other three personalities, and who would also be able to channel the energy and cadences

that Murray made his own back in 2006 – and continued to do so over the numerous audios we produced.

"Colin's such a consummate professional. He did his homework and was absolutely able to channel Bilis whilst never quite doing an impersonation. It's a really delicate, measured performance and again, I'm absolutely thrilled we were able to get Colin in because I can't think of anyone else tackling the role in quite the same way." **VORTEX**

## TORCHWOOD CURTAIN



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THE FIRST HALF OF THE LATEST  
STAR COPS SERIES CONCLUDES WITH SOME...

# ESCORT DUTY

**IT'S THE** near future, and Earth's mineral resources are becoming scarce, causing a rise in global tensions. Two space missions – a project to recover mineral resources from the asteroid belt and a missile platform placed in Near Earth Orbit – result in a further escalation and the risk of war.

**Star Cops:** *Conflict* continues to see the International Space Police Force, known colloquially as the Star Cops, trying to maintain law and order in space. Their investigations bring them into the forefront of the

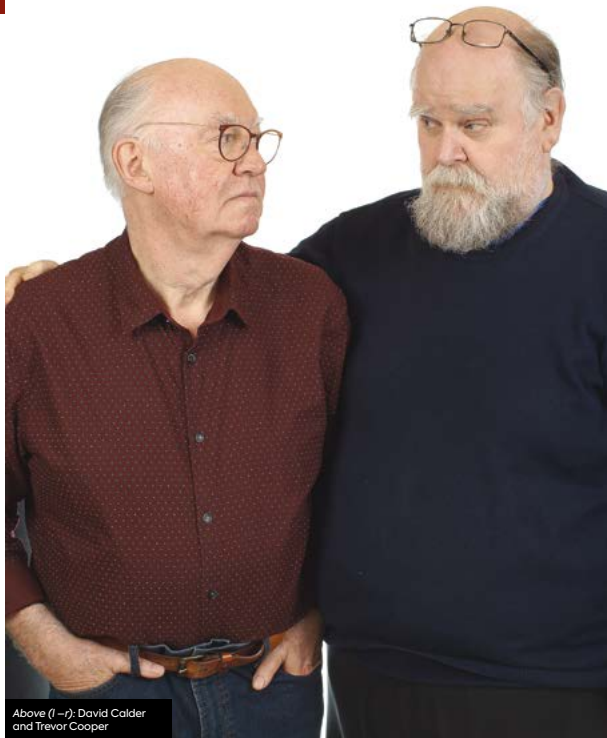
crisis and their actions may affect the future of everyone on the planet.

*Prisoner and Escort* by Roland Moore continues the ongoing adventures of Commander Nathan Spring (David Calder), Chief Superintendent Pal Kenzy (Linda Newton), Inspector Colin Devis (Trevor Cooper), Inspector Paul Bailey (Philip Olivier) and Inspector Alice Okoro (Lynsey Murrell).

Script editor Andrew Smith says: "Getting Roland on board for this series was the first and easiest planning decision. He

provided so many excellent episodes for our previous series, and I'm delighted to say he's written two for our *Conflict* set.

"Episode three, *Prisoner and Escort*, is his first. It's an utterly compelling thriller that comes with a strong, perfectly crafted emotional impact. Alice takes a prisoner, accused of a murder on Mars, back to the Moon. This coincides with a murder on the Moon that has a possible connection to the Mars incident... The Star Cops investigate, unravelling the threads of the mystery, leading to a conclusion



Above (l-r): David Calder and Trevor Cooper

that I'm sure will have listeners more than eager for episode four."

**WRITER ROLAND** admits that he was delighted to be asked back to write for *Star Cops* again. He tells *Vortex*: "I love returning to *Star Cops*. It's a unique show with a unique tone – a gritty and grubby police procedural with great characters that takes place on the Moon and surrounding satellite space stations. There's nothing else like it. And knowing the arc of the series made this one especially exciting!"

"I can't say too much, but Andrew has come up with another amazing arc for this series. The stakes have never been higher and I can't wait to hear what the fans think. What seems like a routine task for Alice soon spirals into something much bigger, darker and potentially catastrophic. We really see Alice tested to the limits in this one as it becomes a tense battle for survival."

Roland is always happy to work with Andrew as script editor. He explains: "Andrew is brilliant and he's excelled himself with this series.

## WHAT SEEMS LIKE A ROUTINE TASK FOR ALICE SOON SPIRALS INTO SOMETHING MUCH BIGGER, DARKER AND POTENTIALLY CATASTROPHIC

ROLAND MOORE

He's a joy to work with because he'll encourage you to try different things and take risks in the storytelling, but he's also got such a full knowledge of how policing could work on the Moon, it makes the procedural details feel real too. Thanks for trusting me with this one, Andrew!

"This was all a highlight, from start to (big) finish, but I particularly enjoyed writing the last half where I could really push Alice, Nathan, Kenzy and Devis to their

limits. Sometimes I wish they could just relax and have a nice cup of tea, but not this time..."

Director Helen Goldwyn says: "*Prisoner and Escort* starts with the rather mind-boggling premise that Alice has spent months crossing space to bring this prisoner from a Mars waystation to Moonbase so he can be prosecuted for a murder he's confessed to.

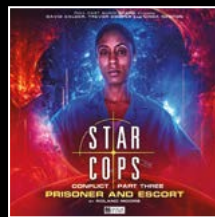
"It's clear from the outset that Mitchell is a wind-up merchant, so casting him meant finding someone with a sense of fun and the nerve to push his characterisation beyond the usual. I immediately thought of Homer Todiwala, who is such a brilliant, versatile character actor and up for any challenge. He has great fun with the role, as you'll hear!

"Our other guest character is Samantha Curran, who is something of an enigma. Ostensibly, an engineer on Mars but, in reality, someone hiding a sinister secret. I knew I needed a younger actor who could also play a dark side and we were really lucky to get Hannah Bristow. She has such an unusual quality to her voice and can do the brusque, 'in control' element Samantha needs.

"The scenes between Mitchell (who initially thinks he has it all under control) and Samantha (who eventually shows him he doesn't!) are a great dance of status and insider knowledge!"

The concluding half of *Star Cops: Conflict* will be released later this year. **VORTEX**

### STAR COPS: CONFLICT PRISONER AND ESCORT



■ RELEASED: MARCH 2026  
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# VORTEX MAIL



## DOWNLOAD DILEMMA

Recently you've announced a new **UNIT** range. It is download only just like the 1990s **UNIT** range, **Sky**, **Space Security**, **Smith & Sullivan** and the **Eleventh** and **Twelfth Doctor** ranges. I am getting really, really fed up of this now. You are prioritising your download customers over your loyal physical purchasers who have kept you going for nearly 30 years. I'd have bought all these ranges on CD.

**Marc Ofner**

*Nick: Hi Marc, I completely understand your frustration, however, I am regularly seeing sales figures where less than a third of customers are choosing to buy CDs. You may have heard us say this before, but I think it bears repeating for context. Post-Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit, CD pressing costs went up a massive amount because of the increased costs of raw materials and transport, so for some ranges it's the difference between profit and loss as to whether or not a CD is pressed. The clear trend is that most customers are going digital-only and there's a lot of*

*anecdotal evidence that suggests many of those who buy CDs never listen to them – they keep them as a collectors' item and listen to the download, or sell the CD at a profit on eBay. For us, warehousing vast numbers of unsold CDs is a costly drain on our finances, both in terms of space and tax liability. So, our slow, restricted move away from CDs and pressing limited runs has been an attempt to lower these costs which put pressure on our production budgets. The cost-of-living crisis has also had an impact on us, which has led to us having to, very reluctantly, raise prices. All that said, we are keenly aware that a loyal, valuable minority of customers like your good self who value CDs, are not happy about this slight shift. It's something we constantly review and we've got a big meeting coming up about it very soon. The ranges you mention were all projected to be modest-sellers, even though we still felt they were productions our customers would want and enjoy. With few exceptions, anything that doesn't feature a Doctor from the TV series sells considerably less well. We hope to find a better solution for our valued CD customers very soon. We're really sorry you are fed up and feel let down by Big Finish. We will try to do better for you in future, but hope you appreciate there are some very complicated issues for us to tackle with regard to this.*

## SUPER SARAH

Can we look forward to some more **Smith & Sullivan** and **Rani Takes on the World** in 2026? As a massive Sarah Jane fan, these two ranges are my favourite Big Finish ranges. It would be a shame not to have any more. They're both incredible series that, in my opinion, are expertly keeping Sarah Jane's legacy alive. Thank you, Big Finish.

**Liam Carson**

*Nick: In many ways, Liam, this is the other side of the coin to the first email's answer. These are more modest-selling productions for which it's tricky for us to*

*afford CD releases. There are no current plans for these series to return, but we loved them and are looking into future possibilities.*

## AN AUDIO REVIVAL?

It's coming up on 20 years now since the end of your previous era of **Sapphire & Steel**. Would contractual issues prevent a revival? Or commercial viability? I can't help but think that since Big Finish's current rota of writers is mostly different to the pool available in the mid-00s, there would be plenty of untapped potential around. Some of your previous episodes were downright creepy and atmospheric, just what the TV series was all about, and just what the audio format and early winter nights lend themselves so well to.

**David Canfield**

*Nick: Unfortunately, it is both contractual issues and commercial viability that are the problem. I'd never rule it out though, David. I really love **Sapphire & Steel!***

## LOVING THE LOST

The **Lost Stories** range has always been uniquely precious to me, both its original four-series run and its 2019-onward relaunch. However, I've lately been wondering about other types of unmade stories that might deserve exploration. Do you think that you would ever look inward and produce **Lost Stories** releases based on your own previously unproduced scripts, such as *Dark Rising* (the Master's original planned audio debut) or *Dead Man's Hand* (possibly Hex's alternative first proper trip in the TARDIS)?

**Elijah Snyder**

*Nick: I have to confess my ignorance and say that I have never heard of either of these titles, Elijah. I'll look into them – they are listed on the internet as unproduced Big Finish stories. So, you're suggesting **Lost Stories** that originated with us and not the TV series? Hmm... interesting thought. **VORTEX***



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THE BIG FINISH MAGAZINE

# VORTEX

ISSUE 204

FEBRUARY 2026

**BIG** FOR THE LOVE  
FINISH OF STORIES



## THE MINISTRY

# OF DEATH

**THE DOCTOR AND SARAH JANE SMITH  
ASSIST THEIR OLD FRIENDS AT UNIT...**

**TORCHWOOD**

## **BRINGING IN THE CURTAIN**

**ACCIDENTALLY SUMMONING THE DEVIL.**

