

THE **BIG FINISH** MAGAZINE

VORTEX



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FRIEND OF THE EARTH

**THE NINTH DOCTOR IS BROUGHT
BACK TO EARTH FOR HIS NEXT
RUN OF ADVENTURES...**

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DOCTOR WHO: THE ROBOTS
THE PENULTIMATE VOLUME
OF THE ROBOTS IS UPON US...





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GALLIFREY WAR ROOM

WE'RE BACK ON THE PLANET OF
THE TIME LORDS THIS SUMMER AS
THE CONFLICT WITH THE DALEKS
RAGES ACROSS ALL OF ETERNITY.

GALLIFREY: WAR ROOM is an epic, exhilarating range of brand-new stories detailing the intrigue and political manoeuvring at the seat of Time Lord power, in the midst of the Time War.

Romana has gone but Leela is back on her adoptive world, held captive and forced to fight on behalf of a corrupt Lord President. But she hasn't yet given up on her mission to save Gallifrey from both the Daleks and Rassilon.

Joining Louise Jameson (reprising her role as Leela) are Ken Bones (the General), Beth Chalmers (Veklin), Chris Jarman (Rasmus), Carolyn Pickles (Ollistra) and Nicholas Briggs (as the Daleks).

Producer Heather Challands tells *Vortex*: "We heard the end of Leela's fight in **The War Doctor: Casualties of War**. We saw the end of the General's fight in the television special, **The Day of the Doctor**. The War Room is the heart of Gallifrey's strategic coordination and finally we are going to understand how their planning plays out."

Gallifrey: War Room 1 – Allegiance will be available from July. **VORTEX**

GALLIFREY: WAR ROOM ALLEGIANCE

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EDITORIAL

OVER THE years, I've been delighted to interview many Doctors for the pages of *Vortex*. I'm especially friendly now with Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy, and they've always been generous with their time whenever I've needed to get hold of them for a wee word.

I was also lucky enough to speak with Tom Baker several years ago to preview an upcoming season of **The Fourth Doctor Adventures**, and it was a call that had me laughing all the way through as Tom answered questions in the way that only he can!

More recently, I've chatted with Big Finish's recent Doctors – Stephen Noonan, Michael Troughton, Tim Treloar and Jonathon Carley – all of whom are just fantastic.

And little did I know I was in for yet another Doctor interview! In February, senior producer David Richardson kindly arranged an exclusive chat with the Ninth Doctor, Christopher Eccleston himself – a conversation I never imagined I'd have.

And it was such fun! We have a shared love of football – Sir Alex Ferguson in particular as he's managed both of our favourite teams (who play in red). This very nicely broke the ice and I enjoyed an interesting conversation with him. Part one appears in this month's *Vortex* with more to follow in subsequent editions.

Chris was every bit as funny and charming as everyone says he is. I'm really looking forward to the next time! **VORTEX**

YOU KNOW WHAT ACTORS ARE LIKE!



THE NINTH DOCTOR IS BROUGHT BACK TO EARTH FOR HIS NEXT RUN OF ADVENTURES

FRIEND OF THE EARTH

IT'S FAIR to say that the first year of Big Finish's **The Ninth Doctor Adventures** have been universally loved, with a dozen stories released in a quartet of box sets. And this year he's back for more! Christopher Eccleston has recorded a second season with another 12 tales to be told as the pre-*Rose* Doctor finds his feet in the universe once again. But get ready for an emotional ride in *Back to Earth*...

Producer David Richardson reveals: "Picture this: I'd just finished listening to the edits of this new box set. My partner walked into the room and saw me sitting in a corner with floods of tears falling down my cheeks. 'Oh, what's happened?' he said. 'Are you all right?!' I shakily responded, 'I've been listening to some **Doctor Who**...'

"Yes indeed, this box set is an emotional one – human characters

living their human lives put into impossible situations. The scripts are stunning and Chris and our guest actors threw themselves into the emotion, excitement and wonder of it all. Put simply: I think this box set is one of my favourites, ever."

Script editor Matt Fitton says: "After the big arc of the last series we've gone for more standalone stories dotted across the whole run.

We did a bit of rejigging between volumes as there were various ways we could order them but I thought it would be nice to have a set themed around visits to Earth, and the human connections the Doctor makes. Whether Russian Tsars or 'normal' people having a New Year's Eve party, he will connect and try to help in any way he can.

"With this series, Chris has now actually done more stories on audio than on television. What's

really nice about these scripts is seeing words that completely suit Chris's Doctor, and each writer has their own take on him.

"There's such a buzz from how much the writers love him – they are writing for their TV hero. Some of them know this Doctor from their youth and now they're getting to write stories for him. It's been a privilege to help guide these scripts."

HELEN GOLDWYN directs these adventures which get underway with *Station to Station*. Matt reveals: "After a strange incursion in the TARDIS, the Doctor comes across an abandoned, empty railway station. It's such a spooky setting – an empty platform at night can feel like the loneliest place in the world.

"Our guest character, Saffron, is stranded there in the midst of a

dilemma about her own life and relationships. She thinks she's alone but finds herself surrounded by echoes of commuters from the past and other people who have been lost there... and then the Doctor turns up."

Writer Rob Valentine says: "Matt and David's strategy for this range was to ask each writer for three suggestions and they picked their favourite from them. The only elements our ideas had to include were that the Doctor is travelling alone and to match Christopher's Eccleston's vision of how his Doctor should be. Beyond that, the universe was our oyster.

"The storyline of mine they liked most for this series was one partially inspired by my own experiences of getting on the wrong trains late at night. So it actually turned out to be quite a personal story which isn't normally the case when writing *Doctor Who*.

"My script is something of a horror yarn, really. It's about a young woman called Saffron who,

late one night, becomes trapped at Underbridge railway station which is the abode of a nightmarish entity that collects lost souls.

Fortunately for her the Doctor also finds himself paying a visit



Above:
Patricia England

to Underbridge on that very same night and between them they turn and face the darkness together.

"There are lots of things I love about this script but I think the climactic confrontation between the Doctor and the story's monster is something quite special and new for the Ninth Doctor. I really don't want to say any more but I was able to listen in as they recorded the scene and I can't wait to hear it with all the sound design in place. Ultimately, having Christopher Eccleston act out words you wrote is just an incredible thrill."

THE FALSE *Dimitry*, the second story of the set, is based on real historical events. Matt tells *Vortex*: "Sarah Grochala is so good at writing historicals, evoking particular eras and settings. This adventure takes us to the Kremlin, the Russian palace in the early 17th century, with the death of one Tsar and another pretender to the throne – or is he?"

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WHEN WRITING
DOCTOR WHO.

ROB VALENTINE

"It's about succession and what happens when there's a power vacuum. Who will step in and who thinks they have the right to step in, and with what purpose? It's very evocative: you can feel the snow, the ice, the Russian landscapes and the Kremlin towers, with the Doctor just popping up in the palace in the midst of events."

Sarah says: "I was absolutely thrilled to pitch a story for



Above:
Indigo Griffiths

Christopher Eccleston. I really like his Doctor as he has a new, gritty edge that I haven't seen before.

"I put forward a few ideas for the first series, which included *The False Dimitry*, and it's ended up in the second series instead!

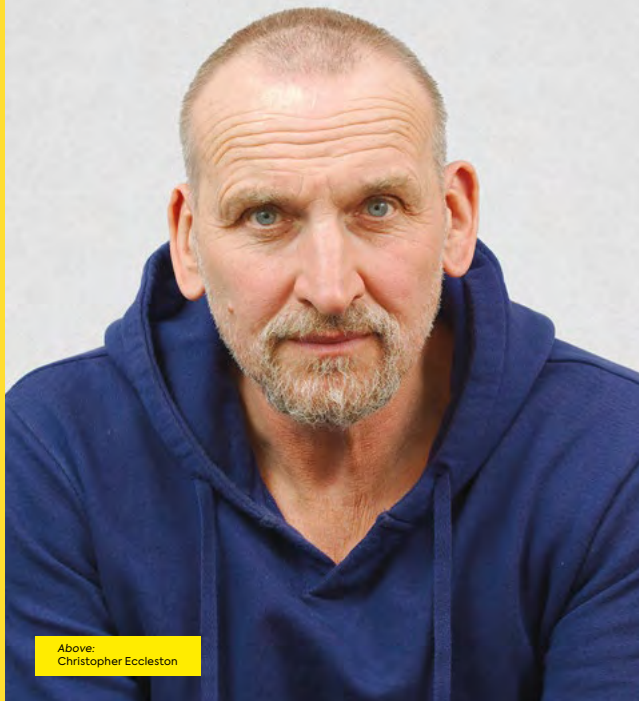
"*The False Dimitry* is set during what's called The Time of Troubles in Russia, at the beginning of the 17th century. It all started with the Tsar Ivan the Terrible who people might have heard of. When you translate his name properly from Russian, it's actually more like Ivan the Awesome, which I kind of like!

"Ivan had two legitimate sons but he accidentally (or perhaps not!) killed his eldest son – he got really angry and hit him on the head.

"As the Russian Tsar you were allowed to marry three times and the children of those marriages were considered legitimate and in line to the throne. But the children of any marriages after the first three weren't considered legitimate. From his first three marriages, Ivan ended up with only one son left called Feodor. Feodor was very weak and tried to rule for a bit but he was probably being puppeted by an influential *boyar* (member of the Russian nobility) called Boris Godunov who, when Feodor died young, became Tsar of Russia. This was all very problematic as Boris wasn't a member of the Rurikid dynasty who had ruled Russia for centuries.

"Ivan had another son, Dimitry, from the last of his seven or eight wives. Dimitry didn't theoretically have a claim to the throne but he was the only descendant of the Rurikid Dynasty left. But he died when he was eight by either accidentally falling on his knife during an epileptic fit, if you believe Boris's version of events, or Boris had him murdered.

"When Boris died a series of men claiming to be Dimitry appeared all across Russia. They said they had survived being assassinated because their mother had spirited them



Above:
Christopher Eccleston

FANTAST-ECC!

In an exclusive interview with *Vortex*, Christopher Eccleston has revealed his joy at being back in the TARDIS for a second run of Big Finish adventures...

IN LATE 2020, Chris made his fantastic return to the role recording at The Soundhouse studios. How has he found coming back to the Doctor's rhythms this time? Chris says: "Unemployment is difficult! Acting is easy! It's easy because the quality of the scripts is so high, as I said with the first series, the work is done for me, really. All I have to do is say things in the right order, leaning completely on the writers!

"The highlight now is that we're all together in real life again. The first batch I recorded in isolation with just one of the sound engineers in The Soundhouse. I didn't even meet my directors in person but when we restarted just this last couple of weeks, I've met Helen Goldwyn my director on these sets, and I'm

spending time in studio and on breaks with the other actors.

"It was a bit strange coming in on my own but it was the way everyone was working at the time. It just happened to be such a significant role in my life to revisit in isolation and it's nice to have the camaraderie and the different energy you get from being around other people."

And the hugs and handshakes? Chris confirms: "Oh yes, correct! You know what actors are like!"

Big Finish's directors have cast some incredible acting talent for these audios, and *Vortex* asks Chris if this was what he expected?

Chris replies: "I've not been surprised by the quality of actors Big Finish has brought in. I've always been a fan of British actors. We're a very talented bunch working in a very non-existent film industry

and a small television industry. It's why we're in such demand in America. There's a couple of actors who are in just now who are working on an HBO series. It never surprises me, the depth of British talent in actors and technicians.

"The thing about Big Finish, which I've said consistently, is the quality of the writing and we're very fortunate as the writers always listen in on the recording, which is great. It's the scripts, the quality of the scripts – they will always attract good actors."

ALL I HAVE TO DO IS SAY THINGS IN THE RIGHT ORDER, LEANING COMPLETELY ON THE WRITERS!

CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON

Vortex has often compared the Ninth Doctor to a time travelling Tony Benn – a British politician who renounced his title as a Lord to be with the people. Chris confirms: "Complete with tea bags! Tony was famous for his tea, wasn't he?"

"What's struck me recently, and I remember doing the series, is the element of the Doctor stepping back and being a straight man for the various exotic personalities and creatures that come by.

"The Doctor is there but other people take the stage. I like that ensemble feel. I liked it on television and I like it on the audios. You have actors coming in doing spectacular alien turns and your job as the Doctor and an actor is to support and encourage that.

"I always connected with the Doctor's love for humanity, even though he refers to them every so often as 'stupid apes'. I think that was a very clever device to give this alien with two hearts a fascination and concern for the human race and their funny little customs. It's interesting to play a character inside and outside the foibles of humanity." **VORTEX**



Above (l-r): Helen Goldwyn, Leah Brotherhead, Greig Johnson, Wendy Craig and Hayley Tamaddon



Above: Shazia Nicholls

away to safety long before the accident/murder by switching them with another child!

"The first Dimitry (there were three or four of them altogether) had his claim to the Russian throne supported by the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth which was the largest empire in Europe at the time and was invading Russia from the west. In the chaos after Boris's death, this first Dimitry managed to seize the throne and

he was Tsar for almost a year before the boyars killed him.

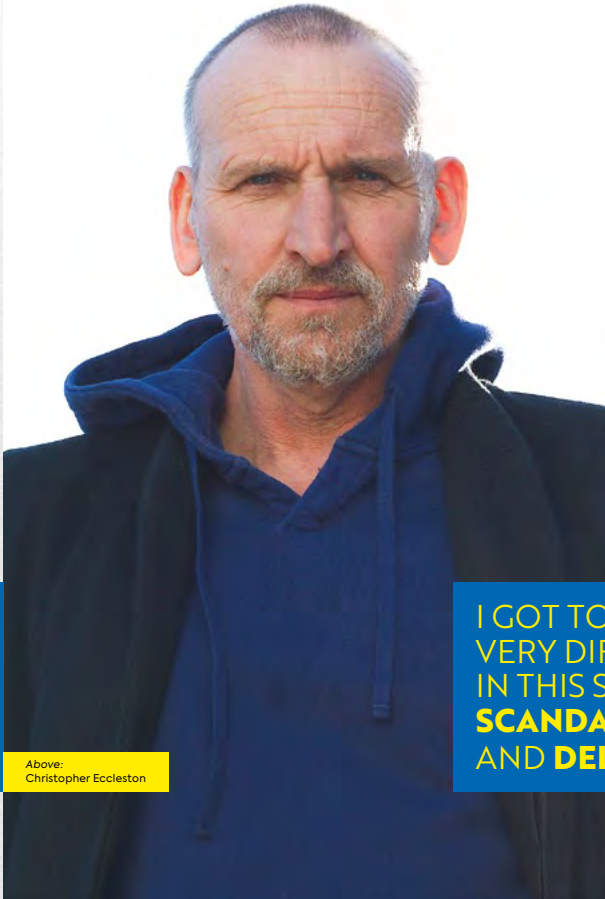
"So as you can see this is a really interesting moment in history and it seemed really **Doctor Who**-y with all these mysterious figures appearing out of nowhere, claiming to be this resurrected child.

Being Eastern European, it was great to be able to set a **Doctor Who** story in my home region. My background is Polish and Poles like to think of themselves as great heroes, so it was really interesting for me to work on a story from a point in history where they were the bad guys instead."

Sarah adds: "When we were given the brief it said that Chris didn't want the Doctor to be a hero. He wanted the Doctor to help people help themselves which made me think a lot about what he was doing and what his role might be in trying to help get the Russian characters out of the difficult situation they have found themselves in."

THE FINAL tale in this set is *Auld Lang Syne* and the listener could be forgiven for thinking that the Doctor has returned to Scotland again.

But writer Tim Foley, who also wrote for the first run of **The Ninth Doctor Adventures**, explains: "No,



Above:
Christopher Eccleston

I GOT TO DO SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT WITH HIM IN THIS STORY, WHICH MAY SCANDALISE SOME LISTENERS AND DELIGHT OTHERS! TIM FOLEY

“It’s the story of the Litherland family and their New Year’s Eve parties over a number of years, 1989–1993. It’s the end of Thatcherism and the beginning of a recession. There are monsters and strange caretakers and bowls full of Chipsticks.”

How did Tim find writing for this Doctor the second time around? Tim says: “I love the Ninth Doctor. And I got to do something very different with him in this story (or should I say to him?), which may scandalise some listeners and delight others!”

“I listened in on the recording and it was phenomenal: the performances are just sublime. There’s a scene between Leah Brotherhead and Wendy Craig that broke my heart.”

Matt concludes: “*Auld Lang Syne* is a great story. It’s about family, relationships, love and loss – all of

it’s proudly set in the north of England, and more specifically Yorkshire – I do like it when the TARDIS lands near to home! My previous episode, *Fright Motif*, had originally been set in Manchester so I was determined in this second series to get a northern landscape in there somewhere! Setting a story in Yorkshire is not just about a location – it’s about the humour, history and the sensibilities – so I wanted to capture something I really knew.

“Matt was very generous and open-ended with his brief and I lobbed all sorts of ideas at him. I was excited by this one because it was my most personal but I was nervous too because it was experimental and I hadn’t properly figured it out yet... so of course this is the one that got the green light!



Above:
Ian Bartholomew

those very human things – with the Doctor connecting with people and one woman in particular, Mandy. It’s a really lovely relationship they build across a strange house that’s been splintered through time.” **VORTEX**

DOCTOR WHO: THE NINTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES BACK TO EARTH



- RELEASED: MAY 2022
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BOOK CLUB



DOCTOR WHO: THE EARLY ADVENTURES THE FORSAKEN

SET IN the past and the future, in the Book Club this month we travel back to the second season of **The Early Adventures** for *The Forsaken* set during World War Two.

Writer Justin Richards tells *Vortex*:

"Producer David Richardson asked me if I would like to write a Second Doctor story with a bit of narration and four episodes, and I said yes, of course I would. I had a think and put together a story set in the early 1900s with explorers in the Amazon but it proved to be a bit similar to something that was being done, or had been done, recently.

"So I went away and thought again and we ended up in the Second World War in Singapore which appealed to everyone. I write a series

of science fiction books called *The Never War* which are set during the Second World War. It's a period in history I know well, and it was great to be able to do something that was already familiar."

With this tale being set early in the Patrick Troughton era, we get to learn more about companion Ben Jackson played by Elliot Chapman.

Justin explains: "There's some suggestion that Ben's father was in the navy or the merchant navy and Ben ran away on his ship when he was 15 or 16 or so. I had to put in a line or two to cover that because in this story he needs to be in the army rather than the navy!

"All that stuff with Ben worrying about his father and past history, and whether he will ever be born if things go wrong was really fun

to do, as were a couple of scenes where we've got Ben and his father together without his father knowing who Ben really is."

WE ENDED UP IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN SINGAPORE WHICH APPEALED TO EVERYONE. JUSTIN RICHARDS

Director Lisa Bowerman adds: "*The Forsaken* has got everything! It's got action, it's got a jungle, it's got unspoken threats where you don't quite know what's what and who's who – and putting it into a war context works very, very well." **VORTEX**

The Second Doctor returns to Big Finish this month in *The Companion Chronicles: The Second Doctor – Volume Three*

DOCTOR WHO: THE EARLY ADVENTURES THE FORSAKEN



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HERE'S HEBE!

THE SIXTH DOCTOR AND MEL ARE ABOUT TO MAKE A NEW FRIEND...

I **OVER THE** past 23 years, the Sixth Doctor has enjoyed adventures with his television companions Peri and Mel, and made a host more new friends along the audio way including Dr Evelyn Smythe, Mila (or Charley Pollard, to the rest of us), Flip Jackson and Mrs Constance Clarke. And now get ready to meet Hebe Harrison, a confident, sarcastic marine biologist.

New producer of **The Sixth Doctor Adventures**, Jacqueline Rayner, says: "It's no secret that I love the Sixth Doctor and rather luckily I also adore the actor who plays him. Way back at the beginning of Big Finish, producer Gary Russell said to me, 'If you were ever asked to write a **Doctor Who** script, who would you write for?' and I said, 'Colin Baker' without hesitation. I'm much, much older now but my answer would still be the same!

"The idea of actually shaping Ol' Sixie's future and working with Colin was something I couldn't resist, it felt like coming home. Parts of the producer job were a bit outside my comfort zone to start with but executive producers Jason Haigh-Ellery and Nicholas Briggs, and senior producer David Richardson have been very supportive. And I have to sing the praises of script editor Rob Valentine. Two people on the same wavelength can build so much higher than two working separately, and Rob's been such an important part of all this; I couldn't have asked for anyone better to work with."

Rob says: "Working with Jac on **The Sixth Doctor Adventures** has been a

wonderful adventure in itself! I didn't know Jac much before we began, other than through her work, but over the course of creating several more years' worth of stories for the Sixth Doctor we've become great friends. This was Jac's first producing job for Big Finish and it was my first ongoing script editing role for them too, so we both rather felt like we'd been left in charge of the sweet shop!"

One of Jac's first decisions was to bring in a new companion for the Doctor and Mel. Jac explains: "I was really keen on bringing a wheelchair user into the TARDIS. Inclusion is such a big deal and it felt very important for **Doctor Who** to be part of that. Also it's

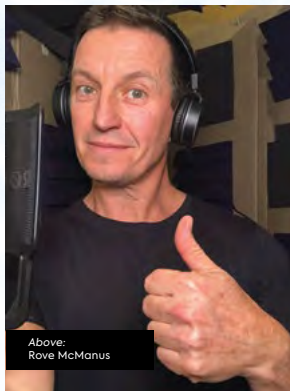
Above:
Colin Baker

a huge challenge for storytelling – not all planets have ramps...

“So when Hebe and her ongoing story were taking shape in my mind, I looked at all the different dynamics there could be and realised there was room for a perfect team of three. They’re all very different but are able to bring out the best in each other and grow together. It felt good on paper and it was even better in practice under the guiding hand of director Helen Goldwyn (who is another ‘without whom’, she’s so brilliant). Total dream team (and the team eventually gets even dreamier – but that’s for the future!)”

What can Jac tell us about Hebe? “She’s fierce and funny and independent and loyal and spiky and brave and clever and passionate and sarcastic. Her disability is an intrinsic part of her – it can’t not be – but she’s complex, no paragon, definitely not there to be an inspiration. All of us in the Sixth Doctor team fell in love with her and we hope listeners will too.”

Was Jac delighted with the casting of Ruth Madeley in the part

Above:
Rove McManus

of Hebe? She confirms: “That’s an understatement! I imagine most listeners will recognise Ruth from **Years and Years** but that wasn’t quite my route. The *Katy* series of books by Susan Coolidge are very special to me and recently Jacqueline Wilson released an updated version of the first book. I expected to hate it – I’m such a purist! – but it turned out to

be an incredibly important work. And there in the TV adaptation was this brilliant actor playing the modern version of ‘Cousin Helen’. That made an impression. Then when I was actively working on Hebe’s character, Ruth popped up on **Would I Lie to You?** and that was it, I sat there thinking, ‘That’s Hebe!’

“Funnily enough David dropped me a line not long after that saying,

IT’S A HUGE CHALLENGE FOR STORYTELLING – NOT ALL PLANETS HAVE RAMPS...

JACQUELINE RAYNER

‘I wonder if you’ve thought of Ruth Madeley for Hebe?’ And I was thinking, ‘Yes! But will she want to do it? She’s so talented, doing such good work, she’s going stratospheric! Do we have a chance?’ There were champagne corks popping when we heard that she was on board. I’m still pinching myself. But it was a bit nerve-racking too. I knew we had to get this right. And you’ll have to listen to find out if we succeeded!’

WE MEET Hebe in *The Rotting*

Deep written by Jac herself. Jac says: “I went through so many ideas for how to introduce Hebe.

Having made her a marine biologist, a water-based setting seemed obvious. I started off with mermaids at the Great Barrier Reef (admittedly partly because I hoped we’d manage to get someone from **Prisoner: Cell Block H** as a mermaid queen!) but that just wasn’t right, it was just too much.

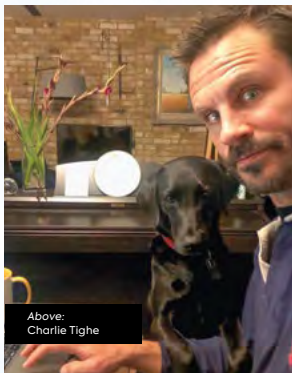
“It became clear that what we needed to do initially was to give Hebe some traditional **Doctor Who** stories to start her off – a background that would show her to her best advantage rather than compete with her. And what is more classic than a base under siege? So Australian sun turned into the cold North Sea as someone or something stalks an abandoned



Above (l-r): Colin Baker and Bonnie Langford

oil rig... although I did keep in an Australian character, just in case. Then we had the chance of working with the brilliant Rove McManus of **Whovians** fame (and so much more). So I immediately shelved my **Prisoner** ambitions – didn't even bother mentioning them to director Helen – as there was no way I could turn Rove down, he's fantastic! But Helen only went and cast an actor by the name of James Smillie in another role – well, there was a name I recognised! Yup, by a wonderful coincidence, I got a **Prisoner** star after all!"

WE KEEP the aquatic theme for the second story, *The Tides of the Moon*, by Joshua Pruett. If you're a fan of the Disney cartoon **Phineas and Ferb**, this is a name you might just recognise (*Vortex* did!). Joshua says: "I've been following a number of **Doctor Who** writers for Big Finish on their social media and when I found Jac's Twitter, I noticed her profile pic was Vanessa from **Phineas and Ferb**! Having been a writer on that series, I



Above: Charlie Tighe

was absolutely tickled that Jac was a fan, and we started a bit of a mutual admiration society after that! Cut to summer of 2020 when Jac reached out to see if I might be interested in writing a **Doctor Who** story for the Sixth Doctor series she was producing. I quite literally cried when I read her email!"

Joshua pitched seven stories for what became this episode – Hebe's

very first adventure in the TARDIS, an off-world, alien adventure. Joshua says: "Writing for Hebe was an absolute joy. Jac and Rob had very early on decided that Hebe would be funny and what a gift that was for a writer like me. Most of my career has been writing comedy, in both TV and feature animation, and comedic characters tend to be funny because they're hiding pain. Hebe has her share of that, some tied to a rather cynical take on the world around her, and some tied to her being a wheelchair user. There's a real balance to being responsible with that and certainly Jac and Rob were instrumental in striking a balance. But the TARDIS is a magic box with enough room for everyone's stories, people of every colour and creed, shape and size, and having our first human companion who came with their own wheels felt both perfectly timed and long overdue; very **Doctor Who** if you think about it.

"For me, Hebe being confident and sarcastic were her defining traits, providing brilliant



Above:
Bonnie Langford

opportunities to bounce off the Sixth Doctor and Mel.

"The Tides of the Moon features our heroes shipwrecked on Earth's Moon over a billion years in the past where they must tackle an alien race living in fear, creatures full of teeth and an unstoppable planetary cataclysm! Impossible odds with plenty of adventure, heart, some jokes and at its core, the Doctor and Mel righting wrongs while settling Hebe into life in the TARDIS.

"I also managed to slip in a few ideas about the Sixth Doctor's amazing technicolor dreamcoat – what it looks like and how he might use it – things I'd been daydreaming about since I was a kid. The lines between fan-fiction and a professional commission continue to blur in hugely exciting ways!"

MAELSTROM, THE

concluding adventure, is written by Big Finish veteran Jonathan Morris. Jonathan says: "Someone who keeps track of these things pointed out to me

the other day that I hadn't written for the Sixth Doctor and Mel so this was new territory for me! Particularly as it isn't trying to recapture the style of the TV show. With a new companion, this is its own thing, written as **Doctor Who** for the 2020s not the 1980s.

"Hebe has a lot in common with the Doctor's other companions: she's quirky, opinionated and the sort of person who grabs life with both hands. But, as is obvious, she's also a bit different. She has a disability but by goodness she doesn't let that hold her back or define her. Writing for her, that was the most important thing to keep in mind. My brother was a wheelchair user so I grew up knowing that being in a wheelchair is not really a limitation; it's the steps everywhere which make it one. And that's Hebe's attitude, I think; she's annoyed that there are steps, not that she's in a chair.

"Looking through my emails, I see that I wrote to Jac: 'I do like the concept of the Hebe

character. I'm thinking along the lines of Ruth Madeley's character in **Years and Years**.' Funny how these things work out!

"Jac put together a complete plan for all the stories in this set. My brief was story three, where the Doctor is giving Hebe a grand tour of aquatic worlds. I first came up with

SHE'S ANNOYED THAT THERE ARE STEPS, NOT THAT SHE'S IN A CHAIR.

JONATHAN MORRIS

an idea which was very similar to story two so I had to have a bit of a rethink! I decided to go for the idea of making undersea life spooky and threatening, the notion that there is this malevolent, nightmarish force under the surface. The Maelstrom!

"The premise – and this isn't a spoiler, it's in the first five minutes – is that there's this 'Flying Dutchman' ship roaming a water-world where the crew are running low on physical bodies so have been forced to resort to downloading different minds into their heads on a sort of 'time share' basis. Obviously the arrival of three more bodies presents them with an opportunity not to be missed!" **VORTEX**

DOCTOR WHO: THE SIXTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES WATER WORLDS



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WE ARE THE ROBOTS

THE PENULTIMATE VOLUME OF THE ROBOTS IS UPON US...

THINGS HAVE been getting complex in **The Robots**, a range featuring Liz Chenka that spun off from her travels with the Eighth Doctor. In **The Robots Volume Five**, Liv, played by the fantastic Nicola Walker, has returned to her homeworld of Kaldor and been reunited with her sister Tula (Claire Rushbrook). But things aren't what they appear to be as, elsewhere, Ander Poul and Lish Toos have been carrying out their own investigations

into the Company. Script editor John Dorney says: "**The Robots Volume Four** tidied up a lot of loose ends but it also threw a few new elements and people into the mix. Most of the characters have met each other now so we're moving from them slowly joining up and uncovering one mystery into exploring another – with a real sense of who the enemy is and what they need to do. "There are three more fantastic adventures in this set. *The*

Enhancement by new writer, Aaron Douglas looks into a strange new piece of technology being utilised on Kaldor which may have sinister implications – particularly for Tula.

"*Machines Like Us* by Phil Mulryne deals with the politics of Kaldor and throws us deep into conspiracy territory. And *Kaldor Nights* finally takes us to the occasionally teased reality TV show where something sinister is going on!"



Above:
Jemma Churchill

AARON DOUGLAS was introduced to Big Finish by the co-star of the **Adam Adamant Lives!** series. He explains: “Milly Thomas put me in contact with the brilliant Matt Fitton (writer and script editor for Big Finish) and we arranged a Zoom meeting which delightfully consisted mainly of fanboying over **Doctor Who** and our favourite episodes!

“I absolutely love listening to Big Finish Productions and the multiple storylines and spin-offs of **Doctor Who**. I’m a big fan of Nicola Walker and Claire Rushbrook and also the original television episode *The Robots of Death*, a classic **Doctor Who** four-parter, so getting involved with **The Robots** is amazing. I also love weaving in bits of lore from previous episodes so I wrote a whole continuity guide for myself with all the robots that had been included plus the



Above:
Finlay Robinson

terminology and incredible world-building that had already been done in the first four box sets..

“John’s brief was to imagine **Doctor Who** mixed with **Black Mirror** and I was instantly hooked by the concept. Also, John gave me a keyword to consider throughout each episode which was ‘consequences’, how does each story build and impact upon another? Finding a hook or an event felt like an exciting challenge. How can we shake the world that’s been built and progress Kaldor’s politics and society in a meaningful way?”

Aaron particularly enjoyed the challenge of working within the extensive backstory which has shaped Kaldor: “Since the introduction of Kaldor’s robots, the unique element that sets them apart

THERE’S
DEFINITELY A
BLACK MIRROR
‘TECH ANGST’
SORT OF VIBE
FOR THE SERIES
TO MAINTAIN.

PHIL MULRYNE

from other **Doctor Who** robotic ‘big bads’ is how they’re built to create ‘luxury’ and a society that relies on convenience and ease of living.

“With this in mind, *The Enhancement* is all about Kaldor’s next innovation in a world that seeks to improve itself. What are the consequences of an authoritarian power creating a safer and more luxurious enhancement for society and where does that leave everyone? When the Kaldor Company unveil their latest technological innovation, Tula and Liv are forced to confront the darker implications of this expansive development.”

Aaron adds: “The highlight of creating this script was learning so much about the intricate differences between writing for theatre and screen – such visual mediums – and applying that to radio and audio drama making them accessible and engaging in an aural world.”



Above (l-r): Nicola Walker and Claire Rushbrook

THE SECOND episode, *Machines Like Us* marks Phil Mulryne's debut script for **The Robots**. Phil reveals: "It was a joy to immerse myself in this world. Although I was

familiar with the Voc Robots on screen, I had a bit of catching up to do with how Big Finish has deepened the world and taken it forward. It was fantastic to discover the complex, sometimes dystopian Kaldor that Liv and Tula inhabit – with all the convoluted political, social and ethical concerns the series can examine.

"John was open to ideas on what could be in the story though there's definitely a 'tech angst' sort of vibe for the series to maintain. There was a lot for me to absorb in terms

IT PLAYS WITH VERY CONTEMPORARY FEARS IN OUR WORLD ABOUT DODGY POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS AND INTERNET ANONYMITY

PHIL MULRYNE



Above: Anthony Howell

of the rich world and adventures that had been developed to date, and then a lot of thinking around how to do something interesting that built on all that.

"*Machines Like Us* is a bit of a political thriller. There's a public figure who seems to be challenging the Company's all-powerful control on Kaldor – something Liv instinctively likes. But a host of questions follow around this person's real goal and motivations, and ultimately around who Liv and Tula can trust. It plays with very contemporary fears in our world about dodgy political motivations and internet anonymity and misinformation, not to mention deep fakes and things like that."

Phil had plenty of fun writing the script, and adds: "Within the story, I hope that people experience a few surprises and rug pulls. But probably the real



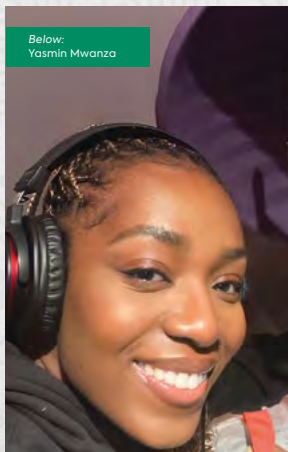
Above:
Sarah Lambie

highlight was being able to write something that the amazing Nicola Walker, Claire Rushbrook and Jon Culshaw star in.”

THROUGHOUT THE range we’ve heard fleeting mentions of a television series, and now we finally get to hear more about *Kaldor Nights* in the final adventure of this set.

Writer Tim Foley was delighted to join an established series like *The Robots*. He tells *Vortex*: “It was lots of fun. Especially as it was overseen by John because then you know it’s going to go in surprising directions!”

“These stories are written in a ‘consequence’ style so before I pitched I listened to the whole series and read the scripts for the



Below:
Yasmin Mwanza

other two episodes in this set. I really like the world that’s been built and decided to latch on to some references in Guy Adams’s stories about a trashy TV show set in Kaldor...”

From what we know so far, *Kaldor Nights*, the title of the TV show in the series, really screams trash, echoing British TV scripted reality shows like *Made in Chelsea* and *The Only Way is Essex*.

Tim agrees: “Oh yes, I tried to shoehorn lots of *Real Housewives/ Keeping Up with the Kardashians* tropes in there. After listening to the whole of *The Robots* in one go, I could see how the heart of this series is the bond of two sisters, and I thought it’d be fun to explore the next stage of that in a domain that’s known for heightened family drama.”

Tim’s highlight for the series was its leading characters. He says: “Liv and Tula are such a sassy double act, I love writing for them.”

WE KNOW in *The Robots*

Volume Six that Liv is on the run and returns to the TARDIS where she’s met by the Doctor and Helen as it was revealed in *Ravenous 2.1: Escape from Kaldor*. But John says he can’t tell us much more: “I can tell you very little – it should be fun though! There’s a piece delving into our heroes emotionally, a chamber piece. And I’ve just read the storyline for the final episode which is a deft and elegant gathering up of all the loose ends. It’ll be an absolute blast!” **VORTEX**

THE ROBOTS
VOLUME FIVE



■ RELEASED: MAY 2022
■ FORMAT: CD/DOWNLOAD

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BATTLE OF THE PLANETS

THE WAR DOCTOR RETURNS TO FIGHT ON NEW BATTLEFIELDS...

THE CHRONICLING of the War Doctor's early life continues with Jonathon Carley reprising his role as the younger version of Sir John Hurt's Time Lord.

Producer David Richardson explains: "The War Doctor Begins range is a mixture of three-disc single arc epics and anthology releases. After the massive stakes of the second box set, *Warbringer*, we're into anthology territory here as three writers explore different aspects of the Time War saga.

"In this third box set, *Battlefields*, we've the stories of a struggling couple on a mini break to a remote cottage, a high stakes outer space mission and a world facing a darkest hour that never ends. What a joy to see writers given free rein in this storytelling universe and witness what transpires."

Script editor Matt Fitton adds: "It's always great to hear the final product and Jonathon is really settled into the role now – giving us that younger War Doctor, discovering who he is.

We can definitely hear a bit of the Doctor developing in him, as well as making the hard decisions that the Doctor would never make."

The Keeper of Light by Phil Mulryne opens the set. Matt says: "*The Keeper of Light* is a lovely script that throws you in at the deep end. It seems a little odd when we first encounter the Doctor and the other characters who have familiar voices but are not who they seem... Emma Campbell-Jones (the ill-fated Cass in *The Night of the Doctor* mini-series) plays



Above (l-r): David Warwick, Rose Basista, Jonathon Carley and Troy Alexander

ONE THING WE HAVEN'T TOUCHED ON WITH THE TIME WAR SO FAR IS WHAT THE THALS MIGHT BE UP TO... MATT FITTON

Layla, Adèle Anderson is Dorothy and Ken Bones plays David."

Phil has previous experience writing for this incarnation of the Time Lord. He says: "It was amazing to come back to this character. I've written for the older John Hurt version back in his second box set but I haven't been involved with the War Doctor since. The great thing about this particular series is the chance to explore an earlier version of the character who's still struggling with what he's become while fighting his first battles in the weirdness and horror of the Time War.

"Matt Fitton was pretty open to any ideas of what the Doctor could face. So here we find the War Doctor in present-day Scotland. The Doctor and his companion are very interested in some strange signals from an abandoned lighthouse just off the coast: signals that quickly become dangerously reality-altering. Of course, it's initially a mystery as to how the War Doctor can be investigating that.

"This is the sort of Doctor and sort of role we're much more familiar with from the Doctor's other regenerations – travelling



Above: Homer Todiwala

the universe with a companion, stumbling into adventures on Earth, solving mysteries, fighting evil. It's exactly the sort of existence he had to painfully abandon in order to become the War Doctor. But all becomes clear by the end of the adventure – it's a story that allows us to see what this Doctor could have been like away from the Time War..."

TEMAMOSUS BY newcomer Rossa McPhillips is the second tale in the set. Matt says: "Rossa came to us through another writer, Lisa McMullin. I had met him a few times and he's got a pedigree in scripts with a military and espionage feel as that's his personal background, so I was considering what series he would be best suited for. **UNIT** sprang to mind and then **The War Doctor Begins**.



Above (l-r): Julian Forsyth, Sarah Moss and Jonathon Carley

“One thing we haven’t touched on with the Time War so far is what the Thals might be up to – traditionally they are the oldest enemies of the Daleks. You would assume they would be on the same side as the Time Lords but they might not be natural allies, as we will hear.”

Rossa says: “I turned to fellow **Doctor Who** friend and avid Big Finish listener, Mark Bradshaw, who’s sadly no longer with us, before writing *Temmosus*. It was Mark who suggested doing something about the Thals. He said, ‘This is their war, really. Why haven’t we seen more of them?’ So I checked with Matt to see if Big Finish had the rights to use the Thals, and they did, and so we went from there. All thanks to my pal, Mark, but it’s sad he won’t get to hear the audio he inspired.”

How did Rossa find writing for the War Doctor, given his military background? Rossa admits: “I suppose I was partly given the



Above: Hugh Ross

commission because I’m one of probably very few writers who has actually fought in a war as a soldier. It’s nice to have a USP, of course, but I regard my time in the military with

very mixed emotions to be honest.

“The War Doctor is supposed to be very ruthless and he can see the Time War as something that isn’t a waste of time – he sees it as a means to an end. I’ve never met a soldier who thinks war is a means to an end. Most of them are tired of fighting, tired of not being around the people they love and tired of seeing humankind at its worst. So I wanted to include a character – Dylan – who would question the War Doctor’s unflinching support for this war. Dylan’s not a pacifist though. Dylan’s a war hero – but what does he have to show for it? A broken marriage, an estranged son and night terrors: like all soldiers in the end. What would you prefer to be – a war hero or someone who was there for the people you love?”

“I looked at the brief for **The War Doctor Begins** and decided that I should mine war films for inspiration in the same way Philip Hinchcliffe



Above:
Jonathon Carley

and Robert Holmes mined horror films for the **Doctor Who** television seasons 13–14. In the end, Matt and David picked my homage to **The Hunt for Red October** out of all my Thal-focused pitches. Basically the plot is this: Thal war hero Dylan has stolen a secret prototype ship and headed to Dalek space without any authorisation from his people or the Time Lords. Is he defecting to the Daleks? Is he planning a revenge mission? Or is it a peace mission? Not even his crew knows. The War Doctor knows and respects Dylan but his primary mission is to ensure that the prototype ship, which he designed, does not get into Dalek control.”

REWIND BY Timothy X Attack is the final tale in this set. Matt says: “Tim came up with a very Time War concept of a world which is facing destruction, again and

again and again. But the population are aware of what’s happening and we gradually discover how the Doctor fits into the strange temporal anomaly.”

Tim explains: “I think the War Doctor has a constantly unfolding personality. For *Rewind*, I tried to imagine something really, really difficult to get out of – a hopeless situation. And then I wanted to tell the story from the perspective of someone for whom the War Doctor is an unwanted creature who drops onto their planet and causes chaos.

“There’s a planet called Lacuna which the Daleks keep attacking. It’s the same attack over and over – literally – it’s the same event. The Lacunans die facing the same hopeless fate each time. And, horrifically, everyone on the planet can remember every last bit of it.

“Then one morning, a civilian by the name of Ignis notices one little detail that she thinks might

mean something new, a possible way out. And that leads her towards an even more terrifying ordeal.”

Tim also introduces a new Dalek: “I was properly gleeful when writing the Berserker Dalek! I’d pitched the idea of a ‘dirty and cheap’ completely unstrategic Dalek for the last **The War Doctor Begins** set but never had the chance to launch one into action. And there’s nothing quite like dreaming up a new strain of our favourite pepperpots! Actually, in my mind’s

FOR ME THEY’RE MAD MAX FURY ROAD DALEKS, OIL-POWERED, RUSTY, APOCALYPTIC.

TIMOTHY X ATTACK

eye, they’re very like one of Ray Cusick’s original sketch designs back in the 1960s: the one with the jagged and sharp body and over-extended limbs. For me they’re **Mad Max Fury Road** Daleks, oil-powered, rusty, apocalyptic. And it doesn’t matter that they’re hellishly noisy and have no stealth mode... because if you’re close enough to hear them coming, that’s it, you’re done for. OB-LIT-ER-ATE!” **VORTEX**

DOCTOR WHO: THE WAR DOCTOR BEGINS BATTLEGROUND



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RE-MEET THE GANG?

I love **The Paternoster Gang** range and I'm hoping that we'll see more box sets on the horizon? Are there plans for the series to recommence soon? Fingers crossed!

Blair Jobson

*Nick: We do indeed hope to work again with **The Paternoster Gang**, Blair, as we love them too!*

BROUGHT TO BOOK

I was wondering if the early **Blake's 7** books could be put onto audio, and the same with the rest of the Benny books, especially *Life During War Time*?

Liam Kemble-Young

Nick: It's something we'll be looking into, Liam, but there are no firm plans as yet.

BOX CLEVER

The larger **Doctor Who** box sets have been beautifully put together and are extremely collectible just for their great appearance let alone the story content inside. However, I've just received *The Annihilators* CD box set and encountered exactly the same problem as with previous similar purchases. Despite all my best and most careful attempts to remove the CDs from the very thin card box, including trying to pry open the cardboard side container, I've had to give up and cut the box to release its contents. I'd rather receive the CDs without packaging than have to go through the hassle and I know that I'm not the only person to have experienced similar problems. I appreciate that the card case has to be secure to protect the CDs along with shrink wrap but it does seem such a shame that the attractive box has to be damaged to get to the discs. Hope you can sort for future releases.

Richard Walter

Nick: Thanks for raising this, Richard. I've spoken to the team and they've made me aware that it can indeed be difficult. They suggest using a letter opener, which apparently works well.

SERVICE WITH A SMILE

As a regular Big Finish customer, I wondered if it was okay to give a shoutout in *Vortex Mail* to the people at Big Finish who work in the sales side of things. Any time there is a problem or an enquiry I have they're always so polite and friendly and always go above and beyond to make me feel valued as a customer.

Louise Wade

*Nick: Louise, thank you that is a lovely thing to say. I know our sales and customer service team will really appreciate it. They really are the best. **VORTEX***

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