

# VORTEX



# RANI TAKES ON THE WORLD!

Sarah Jane Smith's protégé returns on audio as she leads her own series...

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Commander John Koenig is played once again by the BAFTA-winning Mark Bonnar. A lifelong fan of the classic show, Mark says: "*Dragon's Domain* was my favourite episode as a child. As is often the case, things go a little bit haywire. It gave me a very specific nightmare which has stayed with me forever."

Producer David Richardson tells *Vortex*:

"*Dragon's Domain* is one of the most loved episodes of **Space: 1999** so we didn't approach a remake lightly. The original TV script centred around the character of Alan Carter, before it was revised to focus on a new guest character called Tony Cellini.

"We've gone back to the original intent so in our version it's Alan's story, and because of that the danger feels much closer to home..." **VORTEX**

## SPACE: 1999 DRAGON'S DOMAIN

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# EDITORIAL

**VERY EXCITING** news! A new spin-off range is being previewed in this issue of *Vortex* as Anjali Mohindra returns to her famous **Doctor Who** role. Rani Chandra is back in **Rani Takes on the World**, set several years after **The Sarah Jane Adventures**.

I can't deny that I've got a real buzz for this one. In preparation for the article, I dug out **The Sarah Jane Adventures** on DVD and realised that I'd never actually seen the final episodes of series five as I'd found them too difficult to watch after Elisabeth Sladen's passing. I then also discovered on Twitter that I wasn't the only one who felt this.

So what a joy it is for me now to not only have unseen television episodes to watch, but to have the new audio range as well. The talent is top notch and includes writer Joseph Lidster (whose career began with Big Finish before graduating to TV), and we're in safe hands with producer Emily Cook.

Oh, and some fella by the name of Russell T Davies has had some input as well...

We're in **VERY** safe hands! **VORTEX**

*Kerry*



Sarah Jane Smith's protégé returns on audio as she leads her own series...

# TIME FOR THE RANI

**ONE OF** the few highlights of the global lockdowns of 2020 were the snippets of new **Doctor Who** which were created for watchalongs. Viewers could link in to a certain episode at a set time, and then pop on to Twitter to share their joy as the events unfolded on screen.

One of the stories was *Farewell, Sarah Jane* – a loving coda to **The Sarah Jane Adventures** – written by Russell T Davies and released on the official BBC **Doctor Who** YouTube channel as a tribute to the late, great Elisabeth Sladen.

And that story now continues in **Rani Takes on the World** as Anjali Mohindra reprises her role as Rani – a part that kickstarted her career.

Producer Emily Cook says: "Ever since producing *Farewell, Sarah Jane* in lockdown I was anticipating that

a Rani spin-off might happen. I was really keen to be involved from early on because I had so many ideas for what the series could be. Naturally, I was thrilled when it came about.

"I utterly adored **The Sarah Jane Adventures**. I remember being delighted that there was a **Doctor Who** spin-off that I could watch (because I was too young for **Torchwood**). And then when I sat down in front of it, I was entranced. There is something completely magical about it. I've always been a bit of a budding journalist myself so I loved Sarah Jane, I thought she was brilliant.

"Of all the characters in the **Doctor Who** universe, I think Rani is the one I relate to the most in terms of what she's like, what she does and what drives her. So I'm really pleased that I've got the chance to explore

the next chapters of Rani's life."

A key part of this new range was Russell T Davies, and Emily reveals: "Despite being the busiest man on the planet, Russell was wonderfully willing to have a Zoom chat with all of our **Rani** writers. And it was an invaluable session because it made sure everyone was on the same page in terms of the direction of the series.

"It was really important to me to get this release right because it is part of Sarah Jane's legacy. So I was very grateful to have Russell's input. Plus, of course, Russell is the most creatively inspiring person ever; having him on the call felt like charging the series with rocket-fuel! Everyone was even more excited than they already were to get started."

Two box sets of **Rani** adventures are on the way.



Above: Anjali Mohindra

Emily tells *Vortex*: “Sarah Jane Smith was a huge part of Rani’s formative teenage years. How did this influence and inspire the woman she is today? That’s what **Rani Takes on the World** is all about.

Script editor Matt Fitton adds: “At quite an early stage we worked out a series plan, much as we did with the *Rose Tyler* series, and we batted ideas back and forth with Russell.

“Then, in the meeting with Emily, myself and the writers, he gave us a steer to make sure that we carried the Sarah Jane torch forward in the right way.”

**THE RESULT** is this first box set, *Beyond Bannerman Road*, which opens with *Here Today* by Joseph Lidster, and sees Daniel Anthony return as Clyde Langer. Emily says: “We pick up with

## HE GAVE US A STEER TO MAKE SURE THAT WE CARRIED THE **SARAH JANE** TORCH FORWARD IN THE RIGHT WAY.

MATT FITTON

Rani who is following in Sarah Jane’s footsteps as a high-achieving investigative journalist with a popular podcast, seeking to right wrongs and fight for the truth. She’s reunited with her best pal Clyde, and they are quickly thrust into an adventure, just like the good old days. It’s a gorgeous script.”

Matt adds: “Joe was top of our list because he’d written for the television show and knows *Big Finish*, so it made absolute sense to bring in Joe to kick it off – and he was very, very excited to be doing it! I think he started straight away – he certainly got the first draft back really fast.”

Joe confirms: “I was so pleased. Working on **The Sarah Jane Adventures** was one of the happiest periods of my life so the chance to revisit that world 15 years on was just brilliant. Anjali and Danny were – and are – so fantastic as



Above (l-r): Daniel Anthony, Helen Goldwyn and Anjli Mohindra

Rani and Clyde that recapturing their voices was really quite easy. The big challenge was working out where the characters are in 2023.

"My brief was to set the series up. Where is Rani following the events of the webcast *Farewell, Sarah Jane?* We had an online writers' room meeting – and then the second meeting with Russell – so a lot of the decisions were made in those. I think the biggest challenge for me was to reiterate just how important Sarah Jane Smith was to Rani, but also that this is the beginning of a new chapter."

Joe tells *Vortex* more: "**Rani Takes on the World** is unlike anything else Big Finish is doing in that it's set very explicitly 15 years after the characters' previous adventures. So while there is an element of trying to capture the magic of **The Sarah Jane Adventures**, this is very much a spin-off or sequel series to the TV show.

"Rani and Clyde are now 30 and have jobs. Clyde has a partner and

## IT'S SET VERY EXPLICITLY 15 YEARS AFTER THE CHARACTERS' PREVIOUS ADVENTURES.

JOE LIDSTER

Rani shares a house with a mate. They're no longer teenagers but, of course, that just means that they're facing a whole new set of challenges. They have bills to pay and new family responsibilities.

"**The Sarah Jane Adventures** is the series that people talk to me about the most. I'll never forget when an actor I was once working with randomly took me to one side and said, 'I know

who you are... *The Nightmare Man* gave me nightmares when I was a kid!' The Bannerman Road gang meant so much to a generation of children (and adults who knew good telly when they saw it) so I'm just really happy that we are getting to catch up with them again."

### DESTINATION: WEDDING

marks the comeback of another favourite from the TV show as Mina Anwar reprises her role as Rani's mum. Emily reveals:

"James Goss's *Destination: Wedding* sees the return of Gita Chandra, and it's such a fun episode. What I particularly like about it is that it perfectly dramatises some of the societal pressures people (women in particular) experience at Rani's stage of life. Her contemporaries are getting hitched and settling down – but she's not. And that's totally fine. Rani's doing life her own, wonderful way."

Matt explains: "We wanted to



Above (l-r): Anjali Mohindra and Mina Anwar

include Gita, Rani's mum, in one of the stories, and I always go to James for those because he seems to be 'king of the mums'! I've asked him to write Sylvia Noble and Jackie Tyler stories in the past, so it just made sense to go to him for Rani's mum as well."

James says: "Rani is a phenomenon because she is so capable. With a lot of capable people, everyone takes a step back from being with them, but ever since she first appeared in **The Sarah Jane Adventures**, Rani is always a person that you enjoy spending time with because she is fun and she's clever. And she also has heart. And this is what's so great.

"Rani can actually solve problems by being empathetic, by understanding everyone in the room. You know you would want Rani at your wedding because she would make it a better day."

James reveals his greatest challenge when writing this script: "I think trying to devise the most

## IN TRUE THE SARAH JANE ADVENTURES STYLE, THIS ONE IS TOTALLY BRILLIANT AND BONKERS...

EMILY COOK

ludicrous idea of a wedding to end all weddings. A wedding that has many impossible people at it and many ridiculous things happening. But at the same time it's actually a very, very sad story. It's about a girl who wants everything, who wants the perfect wedding day and ends up totally, utterly miserable and literally destroying her entire life... Rani's compassion and humanity

is what actually helps solve it. It was fun seeing how many celebrity cameos we could stick in without definitely naming the people!"

Mina tells *Vortex* that she: "Loved it. It felt like a comfy pair of shoes. The writing was absolutely brilliant and it is such a joy to work with Anjali again."

### THE WITCHING Tree by

Lizzie Hopley is the final story in this run of Rani tales.

Emily says: "I love Lizzie's scripts, and in true **The Sarah**

**Jane Adventures** style, this one is totally brilliant and bonkers, and really plays with the podcast element of the series. I can't wait to share these adventures with everybody."

Matt explains: "We set Rani up as a podcaster which made sense as it's the kind of thing an independent journalist might be doing these days.

"It's funny as this was conceived before we knew anything about the **Doctor Who Redacted** series on BBC Sounds – it dovetails quite nicely as Rani is involved in that as well.

"Lizzie, Emily and I wanted to make this feel like going behind the scenes of a podcast.

"Here, we have Rani working with her producer and engineer Samira, recording footage and deciding what to put into her podcast."

Lizzie says: "To be part of a whole spin-off series was an honour. The Zoom meeting with Russell was like taking a mini-masterclass in story plotting. His mind is wondrous. He sees every problem or plot-slag as an opportunity.

"My task was to basically create Rani's podcast in this episode. Matt and I listened to Danny Robins' excellent podcasts and *Lovecraft Investigates* on BBC Sounds and were inspired by those.

"The 'haunted tree' idea came from visiting the Witchery restaurant near Edinburgh Castle. I have a completely false memory of there being a tree growing through the building: there isn't one! So naturally that had to be written about. There was also the development of Rani and Clyde's relationship. I remember *Moonlighting* being referenced, the whole 'will they, won't they' thing is excellent fun to explore."

Summing up the adventure, Lizzie tells *Vortex*: "A restaurant is



Above (l-r): Anjali Mohindra and Daniel Anthony

famous for having a massive old tree growing through it, except a year ago the tree wasn't there. Rani and Clyde's pregnant fiancée (Phoenix) get strangely drawn to the tree for different (and terrifying) reasons. There are something like three trillion trees on Earth. Imagine if they weren't trees...

"I could write for Rani and Clyde all day long. Their chemistry is perfect, and the tension between drama and humour was one of my favourite things about the TV series. Rani's podcast is an excellent idea. There is such a thirst for spooky/weird podcasts right now and I have a feeling this will run and run. I hope so, I've loads more mysteries I need her for." Emily says of the studio days:

## A RESTAURANT IS FAMOUS FOR HAVING A MASSIVE OLD TREE GROWING THROUGH IT, EXCEPT A YEAR AGO THE TREE WASN'T THERE.

LIZZIE HOPLEY

"We were recording on some of the hottest days of the year last summer, which was wonderful because it meant we all spent the day in a lovely air-conditioned studio (and kept ourselves cool with ice creams at lunchtime!).

"Each individual production's studio days have a different vibe depending on the collection of people, and our **Rani** recordings

were all just delightful. I'd also like to say how thrilled and grateful I am that Sam Watts has returned to score these episodes. He's created a magical sound world for **Rani Takes on the World.**"

### COMPLETING THE

release is cover artist Will Brooks, who says: "I was so excited when Emily asked if I'd be up for doing the covers for these two **Rani Takes on the World** box sets.

"I knew right away that we needed Rani front and centre. The series is named after her, of course, so she needed to be leading. The basic layout of volume one came together quite quickly though we toyed a lot with which characters were going on the cover with Rani. Gita was an absolute must-have. Like her flower shop, she's Bloomin' Lovely!

"I am so happy with the finished thing – I can't wait to hear the stories properly and to have the cast back together again all these years later."

Emily sums up the set, saying: "It has been such a special project to produce. I'm especially excited about this release, I love how it's turned out. It's bursting with heart, humour, friendship, fun, aliens, adventure, life and love."

And Joe concludes: "The biggest joy of this series has been respecting the original series' tagline of 'Life on Earth can be an adventure too'. After what we've all be through these last few years, it's good to be reminded that there's fun and adventure to be found in life." **VORTEX**

### RANI TAKES ON THE WORLD BEYOND BANNERMAN ROAD



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## THE AVENGERS



### TOO MANY TARGETS

**FOR FANS** of *The Avengers*, new content was scarce when it came to stories featuring John Steed and his assorted friends. There were annuals, comic strips and original novels in the 1960s before a huge gap – and then a little-known comic book and an original novel, *Too Many Targets* by Dave Rogers and John Peel, appeared in the early 1990s.

Happily that all changed when Big Finish produced audio versions of the 'lost' first television season stories featuring Steed and Dr Keel.

Producer David Richardson says: "It was hugely satisfying to release the missing episodes of *The Avengers*."

And then when the opportunity arose for adapting *Too Many Targets*, Dave and John's brilliant novel, I leapt at the chance! It was great to have different teams in the same room – Keel and Peel! – and really fun to cast Cathy Gale and Tara King. Beth Chalmers and Emily Woodward were our first and only choices."

Responsible for adapting *Too Many Targets* for audio was John Dorney. He says: "I'd not read the book before although I'd heard about it and was

quite excited by the idea of it. It gathers together all of the previous regulars from *The Avengers* and brings in a few of the villains as well, in order to make it a big, exciting special.

"I dived into the novel with the ambition of making it as plausibly *Avengers*-esque as I could, and I won't lie – I had a terrific time on it. It's a lot of fun. I didn't know where it was going to go when I first read it."

Cathy Gale, originally played by Honor Blackman, makes her first, and to date only, Big Finish appearance in this story, played by Beth Chalmers.

Beth recalls: "I was thrilled to be involved. John did say that as soon as they knew they were going to be recreating the Honor Blackman part, they were going to call me."

"I looked at YouTube to see how she played it, but there wasn't very much in the way of clips, so I tried to base her on what I could find.

"Cathy is very, terribly posh, even posher than normal Honor Blackman, but the thing to do was to find the correct level of 1960s posh, not modern posh! And that meant finding a very clipped way of speaking.

"Cathy doesn't have a lot of

emotion in her voice either. Sometimes she will have a bit of urgency, but she's always very calm. I lowered my voice slightly."

**Doctor Who's** Henry Gordon Jago actor Christopher Benjamin joined the cast as Mother, having appeared in three TV episodes of *The Avengers* opposite Patrick Macnee.

He recalls: "I do remember seeing Patrick Newell, who played the original Mother. He was very good, wasn't he?"

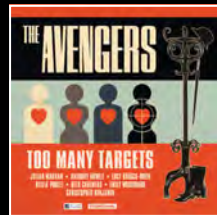
"I only did a day as Mother, but it was a good day, and I would love to do some more. Playing Mother was very different from Henry Gordon Jago – much easier!

"I thought Julian Wadham was very good as Steed, he's absolutely ideal. You can see a lot of Steed in him, he has those wonderful light touches like Patrick Macnee."

The very last scene of *Too Many Targets* is something which didn't appear in the book and is guaranteed to raise a smile with fans of the show.

John confirms: "I'm so pleased with the final scene. It was a little bit mad, even by my standards!" **VORTEX**

### THE AVENGERS TOO MANY TARGETS



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■ FORMAT: DOWNLOAD

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## ESCAPE FROM

# KALDOOR

Liv Chenka is about to leave her homeworld to rejoin the Doctor and Helen on their travels...

**LIV CHENKA** could hear explosions in the distance as she ran across the Kaldor hillside.

"They'll just have to deal with the future themselves...", she muttered to herself, then came to a halt. "This is the time, this is the place. Come on, come on!"

A wheezing groaning sound filled the air, prompting a joyous Liv to proclaim, "I don't believe it! Guess there's a first time for everything."

A solid blue cuboid shape faded into existence: a 20<sup>th</sup> century British police box, and its right-hand door creaked opened. Out stepped a middle-aged man in a blue leather jacket, and at his side, a blonde-haired younger woman with a naturally inquisitive face.

The woman, Helen, turned to her companion and proclaimed, "There she is, Doctor! I knew we could do it."

Liv ran over to them, prompting

a concerned Doctor to ask, "Liv? Is everything alright?"

His friend replied, coldly, "Yep. Let's go."

As another explosion sounded in the distance, the Doctor noted, "According to the TARDIS, things have changed here..."

But Liv quickly interjected, "Honestly, don't worry about that. I've said my goodbyes."

The friends, reunited after 12 months, entered the police box and the Doctor went straight to its control console.



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

*"Liv?" asked Helen. "Anything you want to talk about?"*

*Liv forced a grin as she looked back at her friend, "Trust me. I'll tell you about it some other time."*

**I**N OCTOBER 2018, Big Finish released **The Eighth Doctor Adventures – Ravenous 2** box set, and at the end of its first story, *Escape from Kaldor*, Liv Chenka left the Doctor and the TARDIS behind for a year. Her adventures in which she reunited with her estranged sister Tula, unfold in the audio range **The Robots**.

We know what happens right at the end of that year, and now we're going to hear more of the events leading up to it. Nicola Walker and Claire Rushbrook reprise the roles of Liv and Tula Chenka in three brand-new adventures in **The Robots Volume Six**. Over the course of the previous



Above: Tracy Wiles

five box sets, Liv has discovered that technology is accelerating rapidly on her homeworld, causing the most turbulent time in the world's history... And now, it's Liv's last few

months on Kaldor and tensions are rising both between the sisters and on the streets. Can Liv and Tula prevent a massive disaster?

Producer David Richardson says: "It's the end... and we've been preparing for this moment for a very long time. We heard the aftermath of Liv's year on Kaldor way back in *Ravenous 2*, but now we finally get to reveal how that year unfolded as it's Liv and Tula versus The Company!

"I'm really going to miss this series – it's just been a truly lovely thing to work on. The writers have all delivered wonderful scripts, and Nicola and Claire have just been utterly superb and a joy to work with. Over all six volumes we've been through the turmoil of Kaldor

**I'M REALLY GOING TO MISS THIS SERIES – IT'S JUST BEEN A TRULY LOVELY THING TO WORK ON.**

DAVID RICHARDSON

together – and we've been through the turmoils on Earth together, what with the global pandemic.

"It's very sad to be ending **The Robots** but I'd always planned for it to be finite. Though who knows, maybe in 10 years we'll come back and reflect our real world in it again – whatever that real world may be like. But for now I couldn't be prouder of this run of 18 episodes."

Script editor John Dorney adds: "Our approach to this series has always been a case of thinking in terms of consequences. With each episode, we've never really thought about writing the plot in one episode until we finished the previous one, or at least getting quite close to it, so we were aware of being able to make the journey happen as organically as possible.

"We always had an idea of where we were going to go. There are a few

more story threads to tie up – we had in effect finished some of the early stages of the arc in *Volume Four* – but at that point we began to develop other threads to pay off in *Volume Six*!

**THE FIRST** story of the set, *Force of Nature* by Helen Goldwyn, takes place a month after Tula's enhancement chip was compromised in the previous box set. As a result, she and Liv have joined a compulsory 'Recovery Training Course' to help rehabilitate those infected. But they soon become embroiled in the tensions between the course participants and a very human-like SuperVoc – seemingly with its own agenda...

Helen was commissioned by John Dorney and explains: "I've worked a lot with John and he knows I like a standalone story, rather than trying to tie-in too much with an ongoing arc, so he kindly gave me leeway to come up with something separate to the main character journeys. We had a meeting to talk through ideas and we were all interested in the notion of how humans influence each other and how that might translate into robot evolution.

"**The Robots** is actually so complex in terms of the history and characters that I struggled a bit to assimilate all the information. I had to keep returning again and again to the reference materials to make sure I knew who'd done what and to understand the politics. **The Robots** has an amazingly rich history now.

"I was very excited to get immersed into this well-established world, and I listened to loads of episodes as well as reading past scripts. I'd describe *Force of Nature* as a joining together of two of my areas of expertise in life – science fiction, and training people in communication and influencing skills.

"Alongside my acting, writing and directing careers, I've done a huge amount of drama-led training (using roleplay and scenarios to highlight effective behaviours in the workplace). Once you understand the basic principles of influencing, it's amazing how powerful you can feel. So much of this came into the *Force of Nature* script because I wanted to show what could happen if artificial



Above: A Robot

**THE HIGHLIGHT FOR ME IS ALWAYS WHEN JOHN AND DAVID READ IT AND SAY, 'YES, THAT WORKS'!**

HELEN GOLDWYN

intelligence gets hold of some of the corporate influencing models and uses it for its own benefit."

Helen concludes: "The highlight for me is always when John and David read it and say, 'yes, that works!' This one was tough to get right at the storyline stage, but once that was sorted the script flowed pretty well, and it's such a great feeling

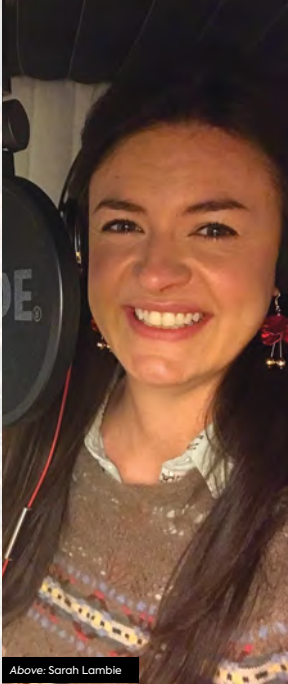
when the notes come back and you don't have to do a huge re-write. That's praise enough for me!"

**SCRIPT EDITOR** John is also the writer of the second story, *Face to Face*.

*When Tula wakes to find some strangely familiar faces in her living room, a battle of wills breaks out. Not everyone can leave... but will they let the right one out?*

John explains: "This story was originally supposed to be in **The Robots Volume Five** as it's something we've been talking about for ages. We've built this world for **The Robots** over the past few years, and this is our last chance to go back and tie everything up.

"I think the idea came about when we were doing the first batch of episodes. Obviously, we've got Claire and Nicola, and I always like a bit of a challenge. For whatever



Above: Sarah Lambie

reason, my brain started thinking, 'Well, what can you do if *we only* have Claire and Nicola? What idea can I generate to do a two-hander?'

"For a long time I was going to call it *Face Value* because that was a title suggested randomly for something on the 'Not the Big Finish Forum' online. I fully intended to use it and then realised *Face to Face* is better.

"The set-up is that we start with Tula waking up, walking out into the living room area of her flat and finding two Livs – and another Tula.

And that's the basic plot which is effectively, continuous, over an hour. They try to work out who is real and who is fake – and why this is all happening."

John also acknowledges events earlier in the run, explaining: "We return to aspects of some of the early stories, the parts I thought it would be fun to return to like meeting Volar Crick. Hopefully the whole thing will feel impressive – kind of an 18-hour drama. And who knows? Maybe we might get to do something more with these characters in the future."



Above: Beth Chalmers

## LIV IS GOING TO STIR THINGS UP AND STUFF WILL INEVITABLY BLOW UP...

MATT FITTON

### THE FINAL Hour by Matt

Fitton sees Liv Chenka's time on Kaldor almost at an end, when the Company seems more powerful than ever.

*There's unrest on the streets, the people are scared. And Tula is in trouble with her boss... But there are those who stand against the Company. Those with a new vision of the future for Kaldor and its Robots.*  
*An intricate plan is in motion – the Chenka sisters are about to spend their final hour on the planet.*

Matt says: "This is a story that's been in motion for a while as we've been leading to the finale, but **The Robots** ended up getting a longer run than we first expected because it was so popular.

"It's great to be able to circle back to Liv's departure from Kaldor which we heard in *Escape from Kaldor*.

"Now, we're able to tie up everything that's been going on in the year Liv spent getting to know her sister again, as well as getting to know Kaldor once more, and uncovering all kinds of conspiracies

and dark dealings touching on Toos, Poul and Sorkov as well.

"I wanted to include all of those elements to bring the whole series to a conclusion."

An idea behind this tale came from an unlikely source as Matt reveals: "I was inspired by seeing the film *Boiling Point* while I was planning this episode. It stars Stephen Graham and it's done in one take. You're in a busy restaurant on one of the busiest nights of the week, and everybody is having a crisis. You follow the characters, moving between the locations and handing over to others. I wanted to do something like that on audio.

"Here, we've got Liv's final hour on the planet, knowing she's got a deadline to meet the TARDIS and get off-world while at the same time the plans of the Sons of Kaldor and the rebels, as well as all the conspiracies Liv and Tula have become involved in, are reaching a head as well.

"But at the centre I wanted it to be about the relationship between Liv and Tula – the Chenka sisters, and to bring it back to the Robots too – the Voccs and the Dums.

"When we started out, we had no precise idea what Liv was on the run from when she goes back to the TARDIS. I just included some explosions and thought, 'Okay, Liv is going to stir things up and stuff will inevitably blow up,' but yes, everything else has been kind of determined by what's gone on in the range as it progressed." **VORTEX**

### THE ROBOTS VOLUME SIX



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■ FORMAT: CD/DOWNLOAD

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The Fifth Doctor and his friends are about to come...

# UNDER FIRE

**THE FIFTH** Doctor's adventures continue in *Conflicts of Interest* with two three-part stories featuring the Fifth Doctor (Peter Davison), Nyssa (Sarah Sutton) and Tegan (Janet Fielding).

*Friendly Fire* by John Dorney and *The Edge of the War* by Jonathan Barnes are joined by the narrated 'interlude' *Gobbledegook* by Frazer Lee.

Producer David Richardson says: "Human beings can be horrible. They can be lovely too, and inspiring and brilliant, but at its worst – its very worst – humanity can be deadly. And that's what *Conflicts of Interest* is about: humans without humanity.

"Reading the scripts I was reminded

a little of both *The Caves of Androzani* and *Colony in Space* – terrific television stories that explored the same theme so brilliantly."

*Friendly Fire* by John Dorney is the first story in this set.

*When the TARDIS needs to reset itself, the Doctor, Nyssa and Tegan find themselves having to fill time on a space-hub filled with numerous attractions. This pleases Tegan and Nyssa no end... but the Doctor is more interested in visiting an alien friend of his, Velar, living on a nearby mining planet and is able to persuade his friends to join him. But on arrival, his friend is nowhere to be found and the locals are more than slightly unwelcoming.*

John says: "*Friendly Fire* led to certain complications in terms of structuring for actors. We usually record two episodes a day. If you've got three episodes in a story, you have to figure out where you've got some people in for half a day. So, you ask yourself, how do you make it work and balance it across what's in the other half of the set!

"The brief was pretty much a three-parter with Peter, Janet and Sarah. I was aware of what Jonathan had written in his script, because he wrote his before mine, and that meant I could do something in contrast. I wanted to create something off Earth in the future because



Above: Alice Krige

When you're consumed with hate, you destroy everything that's worthwhile about being human."

**THERE'S A** trip to Earth in *The Edge of the War* by Jonathan Barnes.

*France in the summer of 1936. The village of Villy is in a state of contentment, tinged only slightly with unease. A kilometre away, construction is underway on a large underground fortification, part of the Maginot Line project which has seen the building of a series of*

## MY CHARACTER, RENO, HAS CARRIED HATRED AND SMOULDERING ANGER ALL OF HER LIFE.

ALICE KRIGE

*defences against future invasion. A young artist has arrived in the village to paint the landscape. Her name is Nyssa and she has taken a room in the local inn, run in its owner's absence by a young Australian woman called Tegan. But she's not the only newcomer. A detective called the Doctor has just got in from Paris. And he has quite a mystery to solve...*

John says: "Jonathan is great with historical stuff. He is so erudite, well-read and has such a feel for these things, whereas I would have to work incredibly hard to do something based in history as my knowledge is limited about it.

"Jonathan knew we wanted a three-parter with this TARDIS team. His adventure has veered into an interesting area of history that I think we're very close to. It's a cracking script."

Jonathan continues: "The brief came originally from the producer, David. He'd been reading something (I think) about the French preparations for the German invasion, in particular the Maginot Line, and wondered whether there might be a **Doctor Who** story in there somewhere. I think what he had in mind was a pure historical (perhaps along the TV episode

Jonathan's is set on Earth and in the past – I felt like I should have a bit of variety. Beyond that, it was pretty much whatever I want to do.

"My first idea came to a completely dead end, but now I'm thinking about it, I might use it at some point in another adventure! I couldn't make it work with the structural restriction so I reluctantly abandoned that and went back in with something different.

"The Doctor goes to visit a friend – an alien – who lives in a remote place, and it doesn't turn out as he'd expect or would have wanted it to. There's a very strange atmosphere when he arrives.

"All of the images that you might naturally expect from a title like *Friendly Fire* aren't there. We usually consider that friends are on our side in a **Doctor Who** story, and here, I'm asking whether that's

necessarily always something you can buy into or believe."

The guest cast features Alice Krige who plays the part of Reno – Alice is known to science fiction fans as the Borg Queen in *Star Trek*.

David tells *Vortex*: "John has written a character-based story, and in Reno we have an antagonist who is richly layered. We needed a phenomenal actor for the role, and at the top of the list was Alice. We have worked with Alice several times before at Big Finish and she totally throws herself into the scripts. What a body of work she has, and what a privilege it is to have her in our productions."

Alice says: "My character, Reno, has carried hatred and smouldering anger all of her life. It's obviously twisted her whole personality. Suddenly there's an opportunity to exact what she perceives as revenge.

*Black Orchid* lines) but it ended up going a slightly different way...

"The story is approached in what I hope is a slightly unusual direction for a **Doctor Who** story. We start in a small French village not long before the outbreak of war. But there's a blissful, prelapsarian quality to it all. A young artist arrives on her bicycle meaning to paint some of the local sights – her name is Nyssa. Meanwhile, a young Australian woman is running the local bar. What is going on becomes only gradually apparent but suffice it to say for now that at the heart of it is something I felt just before I was writing it – what if you could sustain a period of happiness beyond its natural limits? What would it be like to stay inside a happy bubble forever?"

Jonathan particularly enjoyed having the chance to write for this trio who kicked off the show's 20<sup>th</sup> season in 1983.

He tells *Vortex*: "The TARDIS team are great – it's such a lovely dynamic. I found, without meaning to, that the Doctor hangs back a little bit at the start of this one (the first episode is almost Doctor-free) and that the characters of Nyssa and Tegan take centre stage quite naturally. They've been travelling with him for so long at this point that they know exactly the role that he performs..."

"A highlight was getting to write for this team and to work with the brilliant Alistair Petrie playing the Count. It was also a real pleasure to be able to write what is quite a personal story in the guise of what might sound on the surface like a solid mid-season adventure..."

**ALTHOUGH THERE** are two full-cast stories in this set, it's completed with a third adventure – a bonus audiobook download – as the latest

**Interlude** release. **Interludes** are hour-long audiobook adventures with special music and effects bundled exclusively as download extras with selected new **Doctor Who** box sets. *Gobbledegook*, written by Big Finish newcomer Frazer Lee and performed by Dan Starkey, is the first of three **Interludes** in 2023, in which we get to learn more about Velar, the Doctor's friend in *Friendly Fire*.

John says: "Frazer Lee is a friend of



Above: Peter Davison





Above: Janet Fielding



Above: Sarah Sutton

a friend who asked me to give a talk to a writing course. He'd written a film that I'd seen called *Panic Button* which was made about a decade or so ago. I was aware of his work as a writer and that he'd created an excellent, clever script in a one-location setting.

"Frazer didn't know I'm a bit of a budget British film fan, but he knew me as he's a **Doctor Who** fan, which was why he'd brought me in to give the talk.

"I thought he could get on board with something for Big Finish, and it was a question of looking for the right project at the right time. And with *Friendly Fire* coming up, David thought it might be fun to have a story that tied in with it, as a bit of an introduction to the Doctor's alien friend. Velar isn't someone we have encountered before so we could have a story with

them and explore their world.

"It was a fascinating script to read after I'd written the other story, and hopefully it will enrich the whole experience."

Frazer says: "My excitement levels went off the scale when John got in touch asking if I'd like to write an **Interlude** featuring the Fifth Doctor. Now, if you could tell the starstruck kid who watched Tom Baker regenerate into Peter Davison that he'd someday write a **Doctor Who** adventure, I honestly doubt he'd believe you! I had to have a cup of tea and a sit down while the news sank in, and then of course I started thinking of a trillion story ideas..."

Frazer was handed a detailed brief, and very much enjoyed the challenge.

He explains: "The brief was for it to be a fairly high-stakes story but not an 'end of the known Universe' size

threat. The story had to be do-able in the running time, of course, and it soon became apparent that a solo Doctor story might work best. The **Interludes** format lends itself to all of that anyway because of its more intimate, personal nature. I pitched a few ideas to John and David, and the one they liked most was set in a library. Then a bit further down the line John asked me if I would be open to tying the story into his brilliant script for *Friendly Fire*. As soon as I read about the character of Velar it all kind of fell into place.

## I HAD TO HAVE A CUP OF TEA AND A SIT DOWN WHILE THE NEWS SANK IN...

FRAZER LEE

"After a storied career as ambassador, Velar has semi-retired to become chief librarian at the largest library on his home planet Batear. But dealing with stressed-out students cramming for their finals is the least of his worries when he discovers his precious textbooks are being returned with their pages mysteriously garbled. The library's bookshelves are organic, living things and, unless Velar's old friend the Doctor can detect a pattern in the chaos, Batear's entire cultural history will become gobbledegook!" **VORTEX**

### DOCTOR WHO CONFLICTS OF INTEREST



■ RELEASED: APRIL 2023  
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The Star Cops are back on shift and Collective bargaining isn't going to stop the latest miscreants...

# CRIME TIME

*It's the near future and mankind has expanded its presence in space. Maintaining law and order beyond Earth is the responsibility of the International Space Police Force known colloquially as the Star Cops.*

**PICKING UP** from the 1987 television series created by the late Chris Boucher, it's policing as we know it today but just a few years into the future. Producer Emma Haigh says: "I'm always intrigued to see where our adventures with the **Star Cops** will take us, and April's release, **Star Cops: The High**

*Frontier 2*, is no disappointment. Our **Star Cops** are tested once again, both professionally and personally, when a new enemy emerges."

Script editor Andrew Smith says: "In the first release we set up some questions to be answered, as we like to do with these things! What is the Collective? Who or

what's behind it? What's it all about? Who can we trust? Who can we not trust? And Alice Okoro in particular – there are question marks over her. Is she someone the Star Cops can trust? Is she part of the Collective or even more than that? In relation to the Collective, what's she about? And now those questions will be answered."



Above (l-r): Philip Olivier, David Calder, Trevor Cooper and Linda Newton

## I WANTED TO WRITE SOMETHING SUBSTANTIAL FOR PHILIP OLIVIER, AND A FUTURE LIVERPOOL INTRIGUED ME AS A LOCATION...

ALISON WINTER

**WE REJOIN** Nathan Spring (David Calder) and his colleagues Pal Kenzy (Linda Newton), Colin Devis (Trevor Cooper) and Paul Bailey (Philip Olivier) as they step up their investigations into the secretive and ruthless criminal organisation known as the Collective. As they come closer to identifying who's in charge with enquiries on Earth and in space, the Collective strikes back. The **Star Cops** must identify who is a friend and who is a deadly foe.

The first tale in this series is *Old Flame, New Fire* by Alison Winter.

*Earth leave in Liverpool is disrupted for both Devis and Paul when a figure from Paul's undercover past comes back into his life. On Moonbase, an investigation into a contraband food additive leads Nathan and Kenzy into danger.*

Andrew says: "In the first episode, the Star Cops are focused

on the Collective and finding out more about it, and the Collective at the same time are proactively targeting the Star Cops.

"Ali was given the brief of writing a story where Star Cop Paul Bailey goes back home to Merseyside. At the writers' meeting for the series, she pitched for that one because she had some knowledge of Liverpool.

"The episode has some lovely character scenes in it and it serves Paul extremely well. There's a lot of really nice drama including on the Mersey, and it's a great piece of work."

Ali takes up the story: "There was an option to write a backstory episode for Paul set in Liverpool, and the brief was 'his past comes back to haunt him'. I jumped at this because I wanted to write something substantial for Philip Olivier, and a future Liverpool intrigued me as a location to play with.

"I explored a lot of ideas for Paul's home and family so we meet his mum, and his past as an undercover cop presented the opportunity for a blast from the past. The brief was also very open regarding what Nathan and Kenzy were dealing with on Moonbase so I was able to be really creative with that storyline and develop some nice moments between them."

Ali admits that she enjoys getting into the heads of the regular characters: "All of them are so well realised, and have been for so long, that it makes my job very easy.

"There's a lot of fun to be had because the characters and the cast are so familiar with one another that there's a great deal of love and playfulness underneath everything they're saying and doing.

"When creating an old flame for Paul, I wanted to immediately establish a rich history and intimacy that stood up to the strength of the other close relationships in the show."

Andrew adds: "It was always the plan to have a Paul-centric episode. It's great to give your regulars an episode that has a focus on their character, especially in Paul's case. We created him for the series and it's fun to give him a bit of time in the spotlight."

Looking at her highlights from writing *Old Flame*, *New Fire*, Ali concludes: "It was exciting to write for the original cast and their legendary characters whilst layering in more backstory for Paul. And I loved imagining a Liverpool of the future because the city has always been a spiritual home for me.

"Ultimately, I'm proud of the queer representation. We already know Paul is gay but there's not been much opportunity to show this. I think it's increasingly essential this happens, especially if we want to create a future where queer relationships are no longer noteworthy, as we witness in this episode.

"I also enjoyed putting Devis in some very un-Devis-like scenarios, and I think listeners will too."

### GRANDMA'S FOOTSTEPS

by Katharine Armitage is the second adventure in the set.

*Kenzy enlists the help of an old friend on Earth to follow a trail that could lead to the unmasking*

*of the leader of the Collective. On the Moon, Nathan and Devis are dealing with a series of accidents that don't look very accidental – and that will force Devis to reveal a secret.*

Andrew says: "In *Grandma's Footsteps*, we've got Acting Chief Superintendent Pal Kenzy meeting up with an old associate of hers. There's a nice thread of intrigue that runs through this episode, and the Star Cops are getting that bit closer to the Collective and finding out its secrets. There's a strong investigative thread as the pieces



Above: Lynsey Murrell

**SHE'S HOW I WISH I COULD BE WHEN DEALING WITH THE, SHALL WE SAY, LESS RESPECTFUL PEOPLE ON THIS PLANET!**

KATHARINE ARMITAGE

of the jigsaw are put together, with Kenzy in particular conducting her investigations on Earth.

"At the same time we've got Alice Okoro and Russell Wolfe, who's her boss. They feature strongly and we find out more about them, but again there are those questions of who can you trust?"

"There's a big reveal at the end of this episode as they find out who's behind the Collective, which leads us into the next part."

Writer Kat explains: "The brief was all focused on the new criminal

organisation known only as the Collective. They are really the heart of these box sets and a different example of how crime continues to flourish when, despite making it into the stars, humans will still insist on being humans! My episode is the penultimate one so the starting point was all about building up to the finale, chasing down the clues that are going to lead to the final stand-off.

"Kenzy is following the numbers, trying to find a chink in the Collective's armour through a money laundering scheme. She enlists the help of old friend – and mathematical genius – Anya, but the Collective seem always to be a step ahead of them. Meanwhile, Devis and Nathan are investigating some unconvincing 'accidents' and Devis's secrets are about to come out..."



Above (l-r): Trevor Cooper and Linda Newton

Kat loved having the chance to write for Nathan's team. She explains: "I love these characters. They all have completely clashing personalities but somehow that's what makes them a crack team and such true friends. They're always harsh on each other but they care deeply, and I think there's something very truthful in that."

"I knew I'd love writing for Kenzy because she's just such no-nonsense joy; she's how I wish I could be when dealing with the, shall we say, less respectful people on this planet! Nathan is a proper grumpy boss hero, he's had a tough time but he's sort of pure: he will always come down on the side of morality."

Kat adds: "Devis surprised me. I was a bit nervous about writing for him as he's probably the opposite to me. But

## THERE'S A FULL-SCALE ESCAPE ATTEMPT. IT REALLY RAMPS UP THE JEOPARDY FOR THE STAR COPS.

ANDREW SMITH

I found he was really fun to write and he also has this deep vulnerability which all the gruffness is hiding.

"There's a scene I wrote for Devis which was the turning point for me getting under the skin of the character. And I loved creating Anya who is really deadpan and rigid in her thinking, the complete opposite of Kenzy. Piecing together the clues for this was quite a mammoth task so I hope it all works out for the listener – I definitely enjoyed the research. Did you know the UK is one of the world leaders in money laundering? My real highlight though, as always,

is something I can't reveal here so you'll just have to listen and guess!

"It was also joyous to explore new character Alice Okoro, played by Lynsey Murrell, who is a glorious enigma, the only thing you can be sure about with her is that she's clever. Very clever..."

**ESCAPE AND Evasion** by Andrew Smith wraps up the whole *High Frontier* storyline.

*The leader of the Collective is in custody on the Moon, with arrangements in hand for their transport back to Earth under armed guard. But an escape plan is in place. And the Collective's operatives are prepared to kill anyone who gets in their way.*

Without wanting to give away too much, Andrew concludes: "Escape and Evasion was great fun to write. I had some very strong ideas about what I wanted to do with this one, and at the same time tie up all the threads we've got."

"Here, the head of the Collective is in custody on the Moon and there's a full-scale escape attempt. It really ramps up the jeopardy for the Star Cops."

"I've written a couple of character scenes I'm really very pleased with. I wanted to do something that would wrap things up neatly and also have the high level of excitement, adventure and jeopardy that you expect from Star Cops."

"And, there's a little reveal at the end which I think people will like!" **VORTEX**

## STAR COPS THE HIGH FRONTIER 2



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# VORTEX MAIL

## CELEBRATING TURING

I'm writing because I recently learned more about Alan Turing, his achievements and his fate. The 70th anniversary of his tragic and infuriating death is coming up in 2024 and I was wondering – and so wanted to ask – if you would consider making an adaptation of **The Eighth Doctor Adventures** novel *The Turing Test* to celebrate Mr Turing's life and commemorate his passing? Thank you so much for all the work everyone is doing. **Yannick Fisse**

**Nick:** Yes, Turing's story is a tragic one of an incredible genius cruelly treated in an age of prejudice and ignorance. No plans for any more novel adaptations at the moment though, Yannick.

## BLAKE'S SIBLINGS

On a recent rewatch of **Blake's 7's** early episodes, I came back to an old idea I had about the brother and sister Blake had that were mentioned in *The Way Back* that were killed before the series. I was wondering if anyone had made a point of possibly making a set for your **The Worlds of Blake's 7** range telling their story during the initial rebellion. Perhaps something could be done with the character of Bran Foster (as played on TV by Robert Beatty) – do you think there's any possible potential in this scenario? **James Belcher**

**Nick:** Interesting, James. I'll certainly put this to our **Big Finish Blake's 7** enthusiasts. **Blake's 7 producer Peter Anghelides:** Our preference for **The Worlds of Blake's 7** is to feature the heroes before, during or after their time on *Liberator*. Alas, Blake would be a significant absence in a story about whether his siblings ever reached *Ziegler Five* in the outer planets or were murdered on Earth at the time of Blake's first trial. (Terry Nation's original script for *The*

*Way Back* reveals that Blake's parents were also executed at that point.) The same would be true for anything about his uncle *Ushton* and cousin *Inga* from season B story *Hostage*, who a younger Blake had once visited on the penal colony *Exbar*. Though I'd never say 'never' if the right story came along.

sales figures plummeted, Aden. But we did love *C'rizz* and particularly the wonderful *Conrad Westmaas* who played him. Surely, he must come back!

## TENTH'S PLANETS?

I have recently listened to all the box sets for **Iris Wildthyme**.



Above (l-r): Conrad Westmaas and India Fisher

## COME ON, C'RIZZ!

I've enjoyed a lot of Big Finish's Doctor output ever since I got into the audio dramas at the start of the lockdowns in 2020. It's because of you I got to experience more of the Eighth Doctor and he's become my favourite. Some of the most interesting stories I found were the ones set in the *Divergent Universe* and focusing on *C'rizz*, and it got me thinking about how interesting he was as a companion but feeling his run was cut short. My question is, could there be a chance that we could see some more stories with *C'rizz* like a *Further Adventures* style box set for him for example?

**Aden Smith**

**Nick:** *The Divergent Universe* stories were curtailed because sadly their

Having enjoyed releases like **The Tenth Doctor and River Song**, **Dalek Universe** and **Tenth Doctor, Classic Companions**, I wanted to ask whether or not any discussions have been held about further box sets with David Tennant, similar to the already released limited edition sets with Donna and Rose. Perhaps something with Martha? **Andrew Barrett**

**Nick:** We're always looking to make more of **The Tenth Doctor Adventures**, Andrew, but of course it's entirely to do with the availability and willingness of the actors concerned.

VORTEX



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*Ice Heist!* **DLO**

DW | THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES  
*Antillia the Lost* **DLO**

DW | TERROR OF THE MASTER  
(AUDIOBOOK) **DLO**

DW | THE EIGHTH OF MARCH  
*Strange Chemistry* (BOX SET)

BLAKE'S 7 *Origins*  
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THE AVENGERS: THE COMIC  
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*Volume 7: Steed and Tara King* (BOX SET)

UFO *Breaking Point* (BOX SET)

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TORCHWOOD *The Thirst Trap* (72)

## APRIL 2023

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TORCHWOOD *Launch Date* (73)

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## JUNE 2023

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*The Wizard of Time/The Friendly  
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*Stone Cold* **DLO**

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*Doctor Who and the Ark*  
(FOURTH DOCTOR, 2 DISC)

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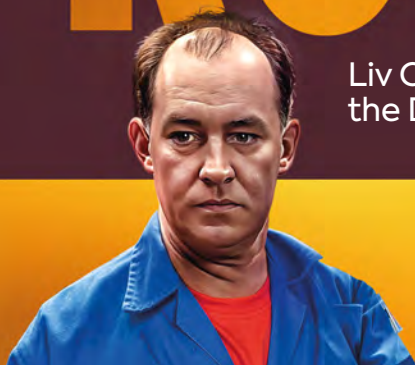
# VORTEX



ISSUE 169  
MARCH 2023

**BIG** FOR THE LOVE  
OF STORIES

# ROBOTS



Liv Chenka leaves her homeland to rejoin the Doctor and Helen on their travels...

**ALSO INSIDE**

**STAR COPS: THE HIGH FRONTIER 2**  
THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE POLICE  
FORCE ARE BACK ON SHIFT...