

CAVAN SCOTT TALKS TO THE BIG FINISH CREATIVE TEAM ABOUT SONTARANS, TURLOUGH'S LOVE LIFE AND SPIKY FAMILIES...

RETURN of the HEROES



ART BY ANDY WALKER



Thousands of Sontaran boots march in time to a dirge-like imperial anthem. Before you know it, the hordes of parading Sontarans break into song: "Sontar! Sontar! We live for Sontar! Sontaran troopers are bred for war!"

So begins *Heroes of Sontar*, the first of three new audio adventures from Big Finish Productions, reuniting the Fifth Doctor with his companions Tegan, Turlough and Nyssa once again.

It's a momentous occasion. Big Finish first started producing *Doctor Who* audio adventures 12 years ago. Every month a brand-new, full-cast drama is released featuring actors from the TV series, including Doctors Peter Davison, Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy and Paul McGann. Along with many of the original companions, they have also brought back some classic monsters. Daleks, Cybermen, Autons and Zygons have all found their way into Big Finish audios, yet somehow it's taken 146 stories for the Sontarans to make an appearance. Why on Sontar did it take so long?

"I actually inherited a potential Sontaran story from my predecessor, Gary Russell," recalls Big Finish executive producer and voice-of-the-Daleks Nicholas Briggs, "but the writer never delivered! Very disappointing. Then when we next started planning a Sontaran return, BBC Wales asked us not to use them, because they had plans for them on TV."

But now the Sontarans take their rightful place among Big Finish's rogues gallery of returning alien nasties. There's just one slight problem though... In the TV series, the Sontarans were always meant to be clones and yet with every appearance they look and sound decidedly different. One minute they're short, the next they're tall, they waver between having three or five fingers and even became distinctly Cockney during 1978's *The Invasion of Time*. So which incarnation of the allegedly identical clone warriors have Big Finish opted for?

"All of our actors playing Sontarans were briefed to watch Kevin Lindsay as Commander Linx in *The Time Warrior* [the original Sontaran story]," producer David Richardson reveals, "and each of them came to the studio with a different variation on that wonderful raspy voice."

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ART BY ANTHONY LAMB

For writer and Big Finish script editor Alan Barnes, the fact that not all Sontarans are created equal isn't an issue. In fact, it's something he embraces. "Just because they're a clone species doesn't mean every Sontaran needs to be utterly identical," Alan claims. "They're not robots. Besides who's to say they all come from the same vat?"

As Alan's story reveals, Sontaran clones are produced from the DNA of many different warriors, rather than all stemming from one original source, which was a relief to director Ken Bentley. "If all the Sontarans sounded the same it would be a nightmare to follow the story on audio. Alan has given each one a distinct personality, which is a very important hook in the story."

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"I needed them all to have their own quirks and characterisations," Alan continues, "because I wanted to write a story that just featured the TARDIS crew and the monsters. I didn't want humans stuck in the middle, because the focus automatically shifts from

the Sontarans. It would have been easier to do an *Earthshock*-type story," he adds referring to the Fifth Doctor adventure that marked the dramatic return of the Cybermen in 1982, "but that's what they would have done in the eighties. We're smarter now."

Other things seemed to have changed in

Family ties

the 28 years since this particular Doctor and his companions inhabited the TARDIS. Back then, the police box didn't seem a happy place to be. Everyone was either squabbling, whining or wanting to get home. Fast-forward to 2011 and the TARDIS crew appears to have mellowed. Yes, there's still the odd audio-equivalent of a withering stare, but the time-travellers seem to be getting on better.

"You still need to include the odd squabble or disagreement – impossible not to, with Tegan and Turlough about –" says Stephen Cole, writer of *The Kiss of Death*, the second play in the season, "But you write it as you wish it had been back then, with them all pulling together, so you can get on with telling the story."

"There's something very interesting about this team," Alan agrees. "You have two really strong women with two rather effete men."

It's a great dynamic. Four people who are all incomplete in the real world – an orphan, two outcasts and a woman out of time – come together to form their own family. And, of course," he adds, "who says families have to be cosy? They can be spiky and awkward."

Perhaps most awkward is Turlough, an alien lad who hasn't had much luck in life. He's been exiled, enslaved and generally distrusted – usually for good reason. Thank heavens that *The Kiss of Death* puts him back in touch with his childhood sweetheart, Deela. Surely nothing could go wrong in a story entitled *The Kiss of Death*, could it?

"I liked the idea of giving Turlough the chance to be the hero for a change, to get the girl and act brave," says Steve, who had originally written for this TARDIS team in 2010's audio drama *The Whispering Forest*, "to explore a romantic dilemma for Turlough, rather than just having him wandering around looking slightly haunted as he often did on TV." But will the course of true love run smoothly for our favourite cowardly Trion? "It's unlikely," admits Steve, with a sly smile.

The Kiss of Death also roots around in Turlough's mysterious past. Back in the TV show, his true origins were only revealed in his swansong, *Planet of Fire*. "It's all just thrown away at the end," Alan says, despairingly, "We wanted to explore some of this background without blowing continuity out of the water. Steve took the idea of a character who knew about Turlough's past and ran with it."

Age matters

While Turlough, played by Mark Strickson, locks lips with an old flame and explores his ancestral seat, another member of the TARDIS crew is left wondering whether she will ever see her family again. Nyssa isn't the little girl that we are familiar with from the TV series. For the Doctor, Tegan and Turlough, these new stories take place just a few days after Nyssa left the TARDIS at the end of *Terminus*, but for Nyssa herself, fifty years have passed.

According to David Richardson the decision to introduce the aged Nyssa was one of necessity, especially when they worked out that there's

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only room for about 15 minutes of additional adventures between consecutive TV stories, *Mawdryn Undead* in which Turlough joins the TARDIS, and *Terminus* where Nyssa leaves.

"The continuity would have felt a bit tortuous," he admits. "Besides, the idea of a post-*Terminus* Nyssa meeting her friends again is a fascinating scenario. In the TV series Nyssa was often overshadowed by her companions, but now, older and wiser, she truly holds her own."

"It also gave us a very interesting story arc to play with," adds Alan eagerly. "As we were bringing Janet Fielding [who plays Tegan] back, it would have been all too easy to make

everything Tegan-centric.

Instead we have Nyssa burying away a hidden frustration. She's fallen back into this family unit after 50 years of being away and Tegan and Turlough are treating her as if nothing has happened. They can't quite see that there's a massive part of her life that they know nothing about and she's changed enormously. She's not a little girl anymore."

"Nyssa wasn't really a favourite character of mine, bar the obvious teenage hormonal appreciation," admits Tony Lee, who makes his Big Finish writing debut with the season finale, *Rat Trap*. "She was a genius and therefore not someone I could relate to. But

FROM DALEK CREATOR TO KING RAT



When director Ken Bentley saw that the script for *Rat Trap* called for a villain who spoke with three voices, he knew that he needed a strong actor to realise the twisted Rat King. Ken turned to *Doctor Who* alumni Terry Molloy, best known as the eighties' incarnation of Davros (pictured left), creator of the Daleks.

"We recorded all the scenes with Terry performing the Rat King," recalls Ken. "Then fellow cast-members John Banks and Andrew Dickens joined

Terry to record all the lines again. It was a joy to watch. Terry remained our primary voice, while John and Andrew spoke over and around his lines, adding colour and variation to what he was doing."

"I was over the moon to hear that the Rat King and Wallace were being played by Terry Molloy," enthuses writer Tony Lee. "It made my day. Terry's one of the best actors in the business."



ART BY ANTHONY LAMB

that's changed. The new, audio Nyssa is half a century older, haunted and keeps secrets. Suddenly the flaws are more visible and I find a reason to really like the character."

Going underground

Tony, best known for his work on the IDW *Doctor Who* comic books, received the invitation to pitch a story for the Big Finish range while visiting his old high school: "I sat typing a frantic 'yes please – don't ask anyone else' email on my phone as parents walked their kids past me, staring at the strange, giggling man in the car. It's a wonder I wasn't arrested." As soon as he got home, Tony fired off a pitch that saw the Doctor being stalked through the London Underground. "Alan thought that the Underground was a little overused and asked for something different. My wife Tracy suggested the knackered old ex-Cold War tunnels than run under Dover and *Rat Trap* developed from there.

"One trick I thought we missed in the first three stories was to do something actually set in 1983," remembers Alan. "We started to bat ideas around and rats were mentioned – specifically James Herbert's *Rats*. Before we knew it, we had

THE STORY SO FAR...

In 2009, Big Finish Productions announced that Janet Fielding would be reprising her role as Tegan Jovanka and would be returning to the TARDIS as a regular member of the crew for the first time since her departure from the TV series in 1984. Janet joined co-stars Peter Davison as the Fifth Doctor, Sarah Sutton as Nyssa and Mark Strickson as Vislor Turlough, reuniting a classic team of time travellers. The result was three of the most eagerly awaited stories in Big Finish's history...

Cobwebs by Jonathan Morris

Searching for a cure to a virulent disease, Nyssa explores a deserted cobweb-strewn facility on the toxic planet Helheim. Her past is about to catch up with her.

The Whispering Forest by Stephen Cole

The inhabitants of Purity Bay live their lives continually afraid of dirt, disease and the mysterious Takers who snatch members of their community in the still of the night.



The Cradle of the Snake by Marc Platt

Worried that the Mara has once again established control over Tegan, the Doctor sets course for Manussa. But when they arrive centuries too early, the Doctor realises that he might have just sacrificed the future...

laboratory rats experimenting on humans in tunnels."

Rat Trap is almost certainly the most disturbing of the three tales in this mini-season, with genetically-enhanced rodents, rat hybrids and a particularly nasty moment in an oversized exercise-wheel. Is Tony a horror fan? "I don't read much horror," he admits, "and I sure don't write it. But this was an opportunity to bring the characters out of their comfort zone, and to do that I had to move out of mine. I needed to keep it dark."

Alan Barnes, on the other hand, hesitates before calling *Rat Trap* a horror story: "There was a time, back in the nineties and 2000s, when *Doctor Who* was largely unregulated and people did some extraordinarily challenging things," recalls the former *Doctor Who Magazine* editor. "Time has moved on and we have to be aware of where the series is now. I always have it in the back of my mind that someone's granny might buy one of these for their 11-year-old grandchild who loves the TV series. You have to be careful with doing really horrible stuff."

Rewriting history

Even as the finishing touches are being made to the Doctor, Tegan, Turlough and Nyssa's latest adventures, work has begun on a further reunion for this team. "We've already planned the next three stories," David

reveals, "which will be recorded in December when Mark Strickson next returns to the UK from New Zealand." Any hints of what might come? I receive the kind of look that tells me that I'll just have to wait and see. Whatever happens, it's obvious that the Big Finish team hold much fondness for this era of *Doctor Who*, but they're not afraid to try and improve on an already winning formula.

"We get to explore the characters we love in a way that wasn't done at the time," Alan explains. "We're able to pull out bits that deserve more exploration, like Turlough's backstory, and give them the storylines they never would have got in 1983. The prevailing attitude of the day was that you could only present someone like Tegan as a stropky woman. With hindsight you can recreate these characters as they always should have been. OK, we're trying to go back and correct things, but if there is an ambition behind these stories, it's to make classic *Doctor Who* better than it ever was." ■

These new audio adventures for the Fifth Doctor will be released monthly on CD and as mp3 downloads beginning with *The Heroes of Sontar* in May. For details of how to purchase these and many other *Doctor Who* audio adventures, visit the Big Finish website at www.bigfinish.com