



AUDIO CDS

DOCTOR WHO

From the Crimea to petty crime

THE ANGEL OF SCUTARI

Big Finish • 129 mins (two discs) • £12.99 (download)/£14.99 (CD) • OUT NOW!

★★★

THE EIGHT TRUTHS

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★★★

WORLDWIDE WEB

Big Finish • 60 mins (one disc) Download available now (£8.99) CD due October (£10.99)

★★★

THE COMPANION CHRONICLES: THE STEALERS FROM SAIPH

Big Finish • 62 mins (one disc) • £7.99 (download)/£8.99 (CD) • OUT NOW!

★★★

Common in *Who's* early days, "straight" historical adventures are rare nowadays; *The Angel Of Scutari* provides compelling evidence for keeping it that way. It pitches the Seventh Doctor, Ace and Hex into the middle of the Crimean War, and bounces them off numerous famous figures: the Tsar, Florence Nightingale and a young author named Tolstoy.

Sadly it loses the battle for the listener's interest on all fronts. The historically curious will learn little, other than that military hospitals were squalid, and Florence Nightingale was pretty fearsome – two things you probably knew

already. A time-hopping narrative structure adds an Emperor's New Clothes sheen to what's otherwise a very dry tale of captures and escapes, enlivened only by Ace and Tolstoy's flirty banter. Come episode three you'll be dying for Florence to reveal that she's actually a shapeshifting alien – anything to perk things up.

The Eight Truths and *Worldwide Web*, the latest two outings for Paul McGann's Doctor, form one continuous tale. To get the most from it, you need to appreciate continuity points stretching back to March's *Orbis*, and be thrilled by the return of a threat from a Pertwee story – saying more would spoil a big reveal, but ponder the titles and you'll work it out. Focusing on a "Life Course" with shades of Scientology is bold, and there are some neat touches, like locating their "Centre Of Balance HQ" at the former BBC Television Centre. Overall, though, it's disappointingly conventional stuff from the most talented writer for this range, Eddie Robson, coming across at times like an audition piece for a job on the new series.

Finally, the latest *Companion Chronicle* sees two fan-familiar names returning to the fold, with Mary Tamm (aka the first Romana) reading from a script by Nigel Robinson, author of several Target novelisations. The setting, the French Riviera in the '20s, is a suitably posh backdrop for the snooty Time Lady. Starting off like an Agatha Christie mystery about a string of petty thefts, it soon turns into *The Puppet Masters* with added Charleston. Mary Tamm's foreign accents are a little dodgy, and Robinson's prose occasionally dips into cliché, but this is a likeable enough piece of trad. **Calvin Baxter**

i Guest stars in this month's releases include Sanjeev Bhaskar (*Goodness Gracious Me*) and Sophie Winkleman (*Peep Show's* Big Suze).

RADIO PLAYS

TORCHWOOD

Wireless Hub

THE DEAD LINE

★★★★

ASYLUM

★★★★

GOLDEN AGE

★★★★

Director: **Kate McCall**
Cast: **John Barrowman, Eve Myles, Gareth David-Lloyd**
Asylum available on CD now.
Golden Age and The Dead Line available from 6 August (£9.77 each)

Three qualities unite these original, full-cast dramas, first aired in Radio Four's Afternoon Play slot: they're talkier than usual (well, this *is* Radio Four), have a liberal agenda (ditto), and foreground some of the show's minor characters.

Phil Ford's *The Dead Line* goes furthest in that last respect, practically writing out Jack and foregrounding Rhys. Though built on an appealingly spooky J-horror notion – answer the phone and something on the line could put you in an ever-lasting trance – it doesn't take that idea anywhere very interesting, although the touching speech lanto delivers as Jack lies in a coma compensates.

ROLEPLAYING GAME

STARBLAZER ADVENTURES

Lasers and fists to the rescue

Authors: **Chris Birch, Stuart Newman**
Publisher: **Cubicle Seven Entertainment**
632 pages • £34.99
ISBN: 978-0-9555423-3-6 • OUT NOW!

★★★★★

The RPG universe is littered with the corpses of SF games, and *Starblazer Adventures* isn't an obvious candidate to crack the genre – it's based on an '80s British comic that many gamers won't have heard of. However, the licensing brings bucketloads of artwork and a rich backdrop, and the rules system rocks.

It's Fate, a cinematic Fudge variant that melds adjective-based skill resolution – you're a *Great* starship pilot rather than a *level 10* starship pilot – with freewheeling stunts like *Threading The Needle*, which lets you slot your ship through asteroid fields. Then there's Fate's defining extra: aspects.

Aspects steer the outcome of events through the use of Fate Points: narrative bargaining chips for the players and gamemaster that enrich the story and hook the players into it. Aspects apply to absolutely everything: characters (such as *Girl In Every Starport*), spaceships ("She's Got It Where It

Much better is Anita Sullivan's *Asylum*, featuring caring copper Andy. When a bewildered girl from the future washes through the rift, Torchwood has to consider its policy on asylum seekers. It's a rare *Torchwood* which doesn't posit "the Other" as a threat to be killed or contained – a refreshing change of emphasis, particularly in these times of ill-informed moral panic.

Golden Age likewise raises a rigid digit to the dunderheads who elected neo-Nazi MEPs. Sure to appeal to fans of Mark Gatiss's *Lucifer Box* novels, it reminds nostalgists for the old days that only dead things can be preserved in amber. Finally answering the question of whether *Torchwood* has bases overseas, it takes the team to *Torchwood India*, which Jack thought he shut down 80 years ago. Jack's former belle *The Duchess* is a marvellous villainess, and writer James Goss handles the Raj-era lingo with élan – good show, old chap! If *Torchwood* does return for a full-length third series, both the newbie scribes deserve a shot at writing the real thing. **Calvin Baxter**

i Anita Sullivan's other plays include a stage adap of Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* – you can read the script at <http://tinyurl.com/anitaowl>.



Counts, Kid!"), planets (Back-end Of Nowhere), organisations (Ruled With An Iron Fist), alien races (Napoleon Complex), and even temporary conditions (Blood In My Eyes). It's fast, intuitive, and fun. It's just like the '20s pulp game *Spirit Of The Century*, with added extra rules for starfighter dogfights, aliens with acidic blood, and so on.

Unless you want hard SF and the simulationist rules to match, this is all the SF game you need. While the default setting is fine, with minimal work you could use *Starblazer Adventures* for *Star Wars*, *Flash Gordon*, or other space opera settings. Don't let the huge rulebook put you off: it's padded out with comic art and rules examples. The game itself suits novice and experienced players alike. **Dan Joyce**

i *Starblazer* was published by DC Thomson, who also produce *Commando* and *The Beano*. Grant Morrison cut his teeth on it.