

The Potential Last Ever Doctor Who Interview with Lawrence Miles

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~(This interview was originally conducted for a fanzine/website called THE ROOM WITH NO DOORS, which fell through. However, as the interview covers all the major points - and as Lawrence is planning on ending his Doctor Who career any second now - it seemed a shame to waste it. Note that although the original interview has been edited for grammar and format, this version contains marginally slanderous sections which would probably have been cut from the fanzine.) **Firstly: are there any questions you don't want to be asked in this interview?** Er. I'd rather you didn't ask me who my favourite SF authors are. I keep being sent these little questionnaires to answer, for fanzines and websites and whatever, and I've had to stop answering them now. It's not that I don't want to, I just... can't think of anything interesting to say about any of the questions they ask. Who are your favourite SF authors?" turns up on about 80% of them, and that's usually the point when I have to give up. Oh, and asking about the Enemy [from ALIEN BODIES] isn't a very good start either. Actually, I think the best question I've ever had is the one Ben Woodhams asked me in the pub. "The Enemy out of ALIEN BODIES: Why should we care?". God, that man's irritating. Intelligence and looks. Can't stand that combination." **So what was the answer? Why do you think we should care?** I don't think you should, really. When I wrote ALIEN BODIES, I just thought it'd be a nice idea to give the BBC Books a solid background to work with. I thought it'd be nice to have this big time-war going on just over the horizon, I thought you could do a lot of interesting stories around it. Only two or three other people ever bothered, of course, but it gave me something to go on. It was never supposed to be a big murder-mystery type of thing, with this huge question hovering over it. At the time, I was planning on revealing who the Enemy was in the next book I did, but Stephen Cole stopped me doing it. And I'm kind of glad he did, because now I can keep the whole Big Time Lord War thing in reserve for the future. **Does that mean you're going to write more books?** No. It means I'm still holding out for Doctor Who: The Animated Series. **Are you really serious about that?** Only in a long-term pipe-dream kind of way. Look, think of it like this. Eventually, there will be another TV series of Doctor Who. And it will fail horribly, because inevitably it'll be aimed at the kind of fan-targeted SF market that didn't even exist until Star Trek: The Next Generation came along and spoiled everything. Doctor Who only works as a family adventure series, but when it finally comes back you can bet any money you want it'll be like Babylon 5 or something. It'll only last one series, maybe two. So then the TV programme will be dead forever, the license will be in limbo, and nobody will ever want to pump more money into it as a TV concept. Not a live-action TV concept, anyway. But animation's just getting to the point where it's breaking through properly, especially now there's so many computer-generated effects around and people are starting to forget the difference between real" film and CGI. Pretty soon, British animation companies... the Cosgrove-Halls of the twenty-first century... are going to realize that there's a massive amount of potential in a British Manga-style movement. We're the perfect country to do that kind of thing, to do the European equivalent of Akira or Ghost in the Shell or whatever. And I want to be there when it happens, and I can't think of a better spearhead for the whole thing than an anime version of Doctor Who. I'm thinking ten years into the future here, obviously." **So if you got the chance to do this, would you tell the whole story of the Time**

Lord War as you see it? Well, epic wars are great for animation. Planets getting wiped out, million-strong armies of Cybermen marching across battlefields, Time Lord warships the size of moons... brilliant visuals. **But supposing the War turns up in the future BBC Books? Presumably, there's nothing you can do to stop Justin Richards using the ideas you laid down in ALIEN BODIES or INTERFERENCE.** He won't, though. That's not what he wants to do. As far as I know, the War thing gets... sidetracked... in THE ANCESTOR CELL. It's going to be pretty much removed from the Doctor Who universe. **How?** I don't know. I asked Stephen [Cole], and he wouldn't tell me. Faction Paradox is involved somewhere, though. I think one of the points of THE ANCESTOR CELL is to remove everything I ever invented from the continuity. It's a mass clear-out of loose ends, and most of them are apparently mine. They're getting ready for Justin's new beginning. **How do you feel about that? Do you think it's a good idea?** I think it's funny. The only thing that bothers me is the fact that Stephen's nicked a big chunk of one of my stories to do it. **Can you explain...?** Well, it's... a bit complex. Back in late 1998, while I was still working on INTERFERENCE, I was starting to think about what I might do next, and... I kind of went a bit overboard. I do that, sometimes, I just get horribly over-enthusiastic. I'd been into some bookshop or other, and I'd seen that the poxy Star Trek people were doing this mini-series of interconnected books inside the range, so there's this set of about six titles telling one great big story. Or something. And I was a bit hyper at this stage, so I thought, that's what I can do. I can write a series of half a dozen maybe" books, about a potential future Doctor and a potential future Gallifrey. War and all. This was before I'd seen THE INFINITY DOCTORS, obviously. I thought, I can pitch them as one big six-book set, and then the BBC can put them out in the PDA slots or something... you can see how I was starting to go a bit funny, can't you? Ridiculous thing to think about, I suppose. But anyway, I went to see Stephen at the BBC offices, and I started to explain this huge concept to him, telling him about this massive story arc and all the things I wanted to do with it. I didn't even have an appointment or anything, I just turned up one morning and started waffling on at him in the lobby of BBC Worldwide. So he sat there for about twenty minutes, just staring at me while I explained the whole course of the future as I saw it. He looked really nervous." **Is this standard practice when pitching a book idea?** No. Like I said, I was a bit hyperactive that week. Anyway, the first story in this cycle was supposed to be called REQUIEM. So it's set on Gallifrey, but it's a version of Gallifrey that knows there's something bad coming, and it's starting to get paranoid and it's putting itself on a war footing. Then what happens is, this enormous artifact materializes in the sky over the Capitol. This huge, black, bone-like thing, which nobody can figure out and none of Gallifrey's people can get into. Everyone assumes it's some kind of enemy warhead, except that it doesn't attack, it just... sits there. Waiting. Then the Doctor arrives, and it turns out he's the only one who can get on board, because the artifact's directly linked to his destiny as well as the future that's bearing down on Gallifrey. Except that what he doesn't realize, until it's too late, is that he's being set up by Faction Paradox. The artifact mission's part of their plans for the Doctor's future, following the damage they did to his biodata in INTERFERENCE. You get the general idea. Stephen didn't respond to the idea very well, though. Probably because of the way I pitched it, I should think. I'm just astonished I was sober at the time. **Getting back to THE ANCESTOR CELL...** Well, just look at the back cover blurb [of THE ANCESTOR CELL]. You can find it on the internet, somewhere. I mean, I haven't actually read the book, because Stephen won't let me see it. No matter how much I beg. But from the back cover, THE ANCESTOR CELL seems to be set on Gallifrey. Which is getting paranoid and putting itself on a war footing. Then this big black boney thing appears in the sky... and just sits there... and only the Doctor can get on board it... and it's linked to his destiny as well as Gallifrey's... except that he's being set up by Faction Paradox... and it's all to do with what happened to his biodata in INTERFERENCE... **Is this a serious accusation of plagiarism? Are the two really that similar?** That's what I'll be interested in finding out, when the book's finally published. I phoned Justin [Richards] when I read the blurb, and asked him whether Stephen was just taking the piss or something. He didn't know what I was talking about. The next thing I know, Stephen calls me up and starts harranguing me, saying things like it's not remotely like your story, what are you talking about?". And I'm shit at confrontations, especially over the 'phone, so I ended up folding like a bloody

deckchair. I'm on the 'phone going, "well all right then, if you say so...". Pathetic, really. Look, I'll put it this way. From what I can gather, what's on board the black boney thing in THE ANCESTOR CELL is completely different to what was on board the black boney thing in REQUIEM, so I'd say there isn't enough similarity for a lawsuit or anything. But the fact remains that, eight months after he rejected my black mysterious artifact hovers over Gallifrey in a Faction Paradox conspiracy storyline, Stephen... with Peter Anghelides, of course, who probably doesn't know anything about REQUIEM at all... went and wrote a black mysterious artifact hovers over Gallifrey in a Faction Paradox conspiracy storyline of his own. Seeing as nobody's ever done a story anything like that before, it's a bit of a coincidence. It's not as though it were something straightforward, like we'd both come up with plots set in the Spanish Civil War or anything." **Are you angry about this, or just surprised?** Not angry. Irritated, maybe. The point is... and whatever Stephen says about the two stories being different, this is the big issue... if I now wanted to do anything with my story idea - if, say, I wanted to rewrite it to fit Justin's version of the Doctor Who universe - then I couldn't. It's already been done. And that's irritating, because if I ever do get the chance to do the animated series thing ten years in the future, then REQUIEM is the story I've always thought about starting the series with. So I'm putting this in black and white now, all right? Ten years from now, if I write a TV script about a big black boney thing arriving over Gallifrey, I want it on record that it was my idea in the first place. Nyah-nyah nyah-nyah-nyah. **On the other hand, not everything you've come up with has been welcomed into the continuity with open arms. For example, your ongoing claim that the New Adventures and the BBC Books take place in separate bottled universes...** I don't think people understand why I did that. Everyone seems to think it was just me trying to come up with some fiendish masterplan or other and force it on everyone else, like, yes, I have just invented a new universe and you will obey me". That wasn't the point at all. When I started writing all this stuff about the different universes, I genuinely thought everyone would reach that conclusion. I mean, the BBC started off with THE EIGHT DOCTORS, which directly contradicts the whole of BLOOD HARVEST. The two can't exist in the same continuity. Or they can, but you have to ret-con them to the point of stupidity. So when I read that, I honestly assumed that nobody would try claiming the NAs and the BBC Books were co-existent. That was how I felt when I started setting things up in ALIEN BODIES, anyway. After that, I started to realize I was on my own. Kate Orman kept mentioning Yemaya, Gary Russell did that god-awful sequel to THE SCALES OF INJUSTICE, and McIntee put Koschei in THE FACE OF THE ENEMY whether anybody wanted him to or not. If I'd known everyone was going to go that way, I never would have bothered with the whole bottled-universes thing. But then, that means I wouldn't have written DEAD ROMANCE either, I suppose. Personally, I still think it's stupid to pretend the two are part of the same universe. They feel different. The BBC Books have always been really weak when they're pretending to be the Virgin books. That was the trouble with VAMPIRE SCIENCE from the start, you can tell the authors are just gagging to get the Seventh Doctor back." **In THE SHADOWS OF AVALON, the Brigadier makes a point of talking about Bernice's wedding. Do you think that was a deliberate attempt to deny the bottled-universes idea?** Probably. And they call me childish. God, I wish I'd never started it all now. I don't know how clear it was, but the point I tried to get at in DEAD ROMANCE is that the Gods of Dellah could just be the Time Lords from the BBC Universe, escaping their doom by shifting into another continuity. Only they're from a higher level of being, so they end up with these massive God-powers. Of course, that all got fucked over by TWILIGHT OF THE GODS, probably because Mark Clapham wanted to suck up to Lance Parkin again by bringing back the Ferutu. I mean, if he wanted to ignore the bottled-universe thing, fine. Everybody else did. But he could have at least had the good grace to think of something vaguely interesting instead. There's this huge build-up at the end of TWILIGHT, this sense of ooh, we're going to meet the Gods, we're going to meet the Gods", and then it's revealed that... they're these minor villains who got used once in a Missing Adventure a couple of years before. Somebody goes "my God, it's the Ferutu", and all over fandom you can hear people doing a mass impression of It's a Mystery on the Mark Radcliffe programme. "It's the Ferutu!" "Whooooooooo?". I think Mark [Clapham, not Radcliffe] still believes that the whole mythology revolves around Lance. Whereas anyone with any sense, of

course, knows it really revolves around Ben Aaronovitch. Hah.” **You don't like Lance Parkin's work, then?** No, no, I think he's a great writer. As a writer, anyway. I just don't think his plots are very interesting, that's all. JUST WAR was an astonishing book, bloody amazing, and what's most amazing about it is that it's a debut novel. If you compare that with CHRISTMAS ON A RATIONAL PLANET, CHRISTMAS just looks crap and embarrassing. But since then... I don't know. I don't really remember much about what happened in COLD FUSION. I know all the background details, about ancient Gallifrey and the Doctor's relationship with... whatever that ancient Gallifreyan woman's name was. I just don't remember much about the actual story. I know the Doctor gets attacked by this bloke with a shark's head, and that's about it. Which is kind of my point. It's the same with THE DYING DAYS and THE INFINITY DOCTORS, I think. The incidental details of THE INFINITY DOCTORS are fantastic, there's all this great material about the Sontarans and the Rutans, and the Doctor living in these old rooms like some half-mental Oxford don or something, but... it's what actually happens that's the problem. There's this enormous artifact from the future... [Yawns.] ...and living on it are these people who go through their lives backwards... [Makes mumbling sleepy noises.] ...and then the Doctor goes through this relationship stuff with that Gallifreyan woman again... [More sleepy noises.] ...and then there's this mind-duel showdown with Omega that's just like every other mind-duel showdown you've ever read since THE TIME-WITCH in Doctor Who Weekly... [Starts snoring.] Yes, I've got to admit, I got a bit bored with that one. **What about BEIGE PLANET MARS?** Not fair asking. Lance had an enormous drag-factor there. Why are we talking about Lance Parkin, though? Change the subject, quick. He's one of the few other writers who's still talking to me. **So do you approve of what's going to be happening in the Eighth Doctor books from now on, post ANCESTOR CELL?** Er. **More specific?** I really liked the look of what Justin [Richards] was going to do, when he took over as editor. He sent me a rough outline of the way he thought the mythology worked, and it was great. There was a big article at the front that basically said, well, when you think about it, neither the Doctor nor the TARDIS are strictly speaking necessary...“. I laughed like a pig. But it's just... I don't know. With all respect to anybody I might bump into in the future, I'm not sure he's got the writers to pull it off. I mean, he can say what he likes about changing the nature of the mythos, but he's still gone and commissioned Terrance Dicks. Also, I'm not sure I like the way he's going about plotting things out. Apparently... and this is just what I've been told, so I'll apologize now in case I'm wrong... he's got a very specific idea about what the new version of the Doctor really is, but he isn't telling any of the writers about it until they actually get commissioned. And that's a mistake, I think. Writers, especially fantasy writers, do their best work when they've got an overall direction to work with. Give a writer a decent blueprint for a universe, and he'll start looking into all the cracks of it, seeing what he can do with the ethos. How far he can push the limits. But if you say to a writer “do something that's a bit SF”, they'll just write some shite with space-rockets and alien bar-rooms in it. I know a lot of writers who'd love to help Justin push Doctor Who in a new direction, but none of them really know what the direction is, so all they can do is keep sending in generic SF plot proposals. Not good. Also... I've got other reservations about the way things are going in the Doctor Who field, but... hasn't everybody?” **What reservations?** Oh, sod it. I might as well just say. It's Gary Russell, isn't it? It's bloody Gary Russell. **Again... more specific?** Well, let's look at the facts. The man's work is crap. He can't write, his [this next bit's been removed because it's probably actionable] for him, and ironically it turned out to be his best book. Nobody likes what he does. DIVIDED LOYALTIES is, if I'm not mistaken, currently the lowest-rated Doctor Who book of all time on the rankings chart. But he insists on taking over as much as fandom as possible, and making things utterly miserable for anyone who wants to do anything interesting. Because the fact is this. The Doctor Who books aren't just read by ageing long-term fans. I've now known four people who got into Doctor Who through reading the EDAs, and the BBC's sales figures are at an all-time high. INTERFERENCE has sold more than anything else I've written, I know that much. The point is, a new fanbase... a fanbase that actually wants to go somewhere... is gradually building up, and the Gary Mafia at DWM seems to be doing everything it can to make sure it all gets fucked up. There's been a kind of division in fandom for a while now, with the old school reading DWM and the newbloods getting together on the internet... I mean, two new

full-length Doctor Who stories get released every month, but DWM traditionally gives them less space than interviews with people who were in one episode of the series back in 1978... but I think it all came to a head in that themed what's been happening to Who since the TV series went of the air" issue. There was this great big blatant headline, saying something like "SOME HAVE SEEN THE NEW RANGE OF BIG FINISH AUDIOS AS THE RETURN OF REAL DOCTOR WHO". Yeah, sure. Never mind the fact that some of us have been doing everything we can to build up a next generation fanbase. Just get a couple of has-been character actors to do the voices, and suddenly that's real. For fuck's sake... but anyway. After that, I remember thinking there should be a proper BBC Books website, a kind of on-line version of DWM just for book issues. Well, for the "new wave" fanbase in general, but with the books at the core of it. I later heard that Mark Clapham was going around saying the same thing, so he's not completely useless. Anyway. I 'phoned up Jac [Rayner] at the BBC... who's a lovely person, by the way, probably doesn't have an enemy in the world... and suggested that someone should do this website thing, seeing as DWM was never going to give us the support we needed. I even volunteered to write for it. She said she thought it was a good idea, and went to talk to someone at the office about it. And what's the next thing that happens? The first regular Doctor Who news-posting from BBC Worldwide arrives on the internet, and it's full of plugs for the Big Finish audios. See what I mean? Gary won't be satisfied until he's got his fingers in every corner of fandom, even though everybody knows he's crap at what he does. When Doctor Who finally dies... and it will die, because now the newcomers are going to start turning away again, and you're going to be left with this dwindling audience of fifty-year-olds who just buy the CDs because they've got Peter Davison's picture on the front... he'll be more responsible than any other single individual." **Do you really think that's going to happen?** Probably. Personally, I've more or less given up on Doctor Who now. That's why I'm doing this interview, I think, so I can get everything out of the way before I go on to something else. I can't even be arsed reading the books any more. I'll be looking at THE ANCESTOR CELL, for obvious reasons, but after that I can't really summon up the will to bother. I say, learn a lesson from Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Take the best bits and move on. **But didn't you want to write for the Big Finish audios?** [Note: in retrospect, this question is clearly being asked just to stir things up. - **LM.**] No! Absolutely not! I'm told that's what Gary Russell's been going around telling people, and that's probably when I finally lost the will to carry on. All I wanted to do was ask him about bloody Daleks. **Meaning?** Oh... there was a point, when Justin took over as editor, when it looked like I might get the chance to do a Dalek book for the BBC. Now, this was the time when Big Finish had just announced that they'd be doing Dalek audios, and it looked as though... if I did do this book... it'd be coming out about the same time as the audios. So I thought, well, this might look bad. It was before DWM brought on the big fan-schism, and at that point I didn't really want people saying I was trying to go into competition with Gary Russell or anything. So I 'phoned him up, in the hope that we could synchronize storylines and make it look like it was all part of one big project. He was out, though, so I left a message on his ansaphone. No, two messages. Asking him to 'phone me back. And of course, he never did. The next thing I know, I'm told that I've been officially blacklisted by Big Finish... like I'd ever want to work for the bugger... and apparently, Gary's bouncing around the place telling people that I desperately wanted to write an audio, and that I kept 'phoning him up and pestering him about it. This after two calls where I just asked him to 'phone me back. I mean, I've just about learned to live with the fact that he's a talentless wanker, but it's the fact that he's been lying about me behind my back that really... oh, you know. The fuckwit. **Let's rewind a bit. What happened about the Dalek story? Was this before you decided to resign?"** No, no. It was the last overhang from... hang on, I'd better explain the background to this. After I wrote INTERFERENCE, I kind of reached the point where I'd written myself into a tight spot. I couldn't just write an ordinary" story about aliens taking over Earth, or whatever. If I did another Doctor Who book, it had to be something quite big to follow up what I'd already done. When I talked to Stephen Cole about this, I gave him a list of about five story ideas I'd be happy doing, in a sort of it's-this-or-nothing way. Anyway, one of the ideas was the Dalek story, because, let's face it, nobody has ever really done Daleks properly, definitely not in the books. And Stephen said that this was actually a possibility, because of... I don't know. Something

about the way the rights to Daleks were going. I remember telling that to David Darlington, when he did that DWM interview. I was trying to do this building-things-up thing, going "oh, well, I probably won't be doing another one unless... no, no, I can't tell you". Bit pathetic, really. Never mind. So, I started working on this Dalek idea, and I began collaborating with... somebody else, who I won't name right now. The thing is, it was all very up in the air. When I decided to resign full stop, I didn't really think it'd be a problem. But then my collaborator started pushing things, and it turned out that Justin as editor-elect really was looking into Dalek stories, and... well, I thought I could get away with doing one more book, seeing as it was already under way. And I never said I wouldn't co-write another one. So I submitted the Dalek plot to Justin, although by the time it was finished I was working on my own again and it only had my name on it. All very complicated." **So what happened?** Justin rejected it. **Why?** Erm... actually, he never told me. I didn't know what his plans for the series were at the time, though. He's made it clear since that he's completely overhauling the mythology, so it could just have been that it involved too many fixtures of old Doctor Who. Which is to say, he doesn't want stories with Time Lords in, and Time Lords were fairly central to the Dalek plot. On the other hand, maybe he just didn't like the story, I don't know." **Does this happen a lot? I think people assume that anything submitted by a known Who writer is bound to get accepted...** Is it bollocks. I've had as many rejections as results. Twelve triers, six passes. Not including the REQUIEM cycle thing, which I suppose is a big fat concept rather than an actual book. **Why so many rejections? What have you done wrong?** I think I've just pushed my luck, generally. SECONDS was rejected by Simon [Winstone?] at Virgin because he said it was too similar to CHRISTMAS ON A RATIONAL PLANET. He was wrong, mind you. THERE ARE WORSE THINGS THAN ANGELS was rejected by Nuala Buffini... she was Stephen's predecessor at the BBC... because she said it was too garphic" for what they thought was going to be a family line, although she did say lots of nice things about it. ENDS was rejected by Stephen because it was supposed to be a sequel to ALIEN BODIES, and he thought it was too cosmic and gave too much away. THE SPECTACULAR AFTERLIFE OF BERNICE SUMMERFIELD was rejected because it was set thirty years in the Virgin series' future and was about Bernice's offspring. See what I mean about pushing my luck? THE WAR was rejected because... actually, I don't know why. Stephen never even bothered sending me a letter. I think he thought I was just taking the piss. And then there was VALENTINE'S DAY. The Dalek one. I think I deserve bonus points for not using the words "of the Daleks". **Was THE WAR actually about the War? As in ALIEN BODIES?** Yeah, but it was... a bit peculiar. It was the week the Comic Relief special got shown. I thought, fuck it, some idiot's going to send Stephen a Thirteenth Doctor proposal, I might as well do it myself. I 'phoned him on Monday morning in the hope of being the first one to suggest it, and he told me that Devid A. McIntee had already left him an e-mail message over the weekend. The thing was, it was supposed to be a story set on Earth during the Big Time Lord War, where history's come unstuck and all these alternate histories are overlapping. So you're never sure whether the Thirteenth Doctor's canonical or not, basically. My thinking was that BBC Worldwide would have the rights to merchandize thousands of old BBC programmes from the '70s and '80s, so what I wanted to do was go through the archives looking for all these old TV characters... most of them from sitcoms... and put them on Earth with the Doctor. There's this big concentration camp where the authorities put strays from other realities, so the Doctor finds herself couped up with all these fallen heroes from the BBC's past, and sharing a cell with Fletcher out of Porridge. The climax of the story was meant to be an assault on the Enemy's base, in which the Doctor and Captain Mainwaring out of Dad's Army lead a suicidal light-brigade assault across the final battlefield. Oh, and that was the other thing I was going to do. You know how in these war stories, one of the main characters is always a traitor working for the enemy army? In THE WAR, the traitor was going to be Mrs. Slocum's Pussy. Because it's a purely conceptual entity, it only exists in her head, and it turns out to be a Shift working for the Enemy. Like in ALIEN BODIES. **And Stephen Cole didn't bother writing back?** No. I think this is my cue to say something like can't imagine why". **Does it bother you much, when something's rejected? Looking back on it now, do you regret that these stories weren't published?** Depends. Simon was wrong about SECONDS, certainly. It was nothing like CHRISTMAS, he'd just missed the point. It would've been a much better

book than DOWN, without question, and it also would have been the first appearance of Faction Paradox. It was sort of supposed to be The Italian Job, with the Third Doctor leading this band of criminals on a raid to rob the Matrix tapes from Gallifrey. In the Whomobile. With little hover-pods instead of minis. On the other hand, I think Stephen was right about ENDS. And I'm glad ANGELS got rejected, because if I'd written it then I wouldn't have done ALIEN BODIES and I never would have figured out what I really wanted to do. Similarly, DEAD ROMANCE is probably better than SPECTACULAR AFTERLIFE would have been. But THE WAR would've been fun, I suppose. And I've got to admit, I'm still very sad that Justin turned down VALENTINE'S DAY. I always get very enthusiastic about a book when I start planning it out, but with VALENTINE'S DAY there was just so much I wanted to say, it was... well, I ended up plotting it out page-by-page, that's how stupidly full it would have been. It would've said everything I've ever wanted to say in a Doctor Who novel. But when you look back at your rejections, the worst thing is seeing the books that got commissioned in their place. Whatever Simon thought about SECONDS, surely it would've been better than A DEVICE OF DEATH? And wouldn't ANGELS have been better than THE EIGHT DOCTORS? Or how about ENDS and THE WAGES OF SIN? All I can say is, that book by Colin Brake next February had better be bloody good to beat VALENTINE'S DAY. **Let's be clear on one thing here. Are you really never going to write another Doctor Who book?** People keep asking me that, and to be honest I think they all miss one thing. I don't think I could get commissioned again if I tried. When I wrote ALIEN BODIES, the BBC Books didn't have any direction at all. By her own admission, Nuala Buffini knew nothing about Doctor Who, and ALIEN BODIES was the first thing Stephen Cole commissioned on his own. There was a sense of a new start going on, so I ended up writing something with a sense of well, suppose the TV movie had taken off, what would I have done with the series?". And in doing that, I came up with a little sub-bubble of the continuity. Even if most people ignored my version of the Doctor Who universe, it was always at the root of what I did. But now, of course, that's all gone. That bubble-universe is gone, Justin's removed it all. If I wrote another Doctor Who book, I'd have to start again from scratch, and seeing as I no longer have the opportunity to make a fresh start of things... because Justin's already got a direction in mind, even if he won't tell anybody what it is... I think I'd be a bit lost. So I'd so no, I'm not going back now. The only thing I'd really like to do is VALENTINE'S DAY, because I've already half-written it in my mind, and to me it unquestionably looks like the best thing I've ever done in Doctor Who. I suppose there's always a chance Justin might let it through one day. Once he's built his own version of the mythology, there might be things to take the place of the Time Lords and make it a feasible proposition again, who knows? On the other hand, he might just not like the story very much. As I said, he never really made that clear to me." **Coming back to your resignation...** It always comes back to my resignation. **Do I take it that you're completely unrepentant?** I kind of regret doing it, but only because... the thing is, if I hadn't done it then I probably wouldn't write another Doctor Who book anyway, but I regret closing the door that completely. If I'd known then what I knew now, I wouldn't have posted a message [on the newsgroups] like that. **What do you know now that you didn't know then?** Anything about the internet at all. Please bear that in mind, I'm not on the internet, the information revolution passed me by completely. For one thing, since I posted the message I've found out that writers are always doing that kind of thing. They post these whining, pitiful pseudo-resignations, then come back when enough people have gone no no, we love you really, please come back". It's a standard tactic, which... which I want to put myself a long way away from, obviously. I knew bugger all about web politics, and I made the terrible mistake of saying what I actually meant. Not for the first time." **Do you think that's how people perceived it? A plea for sympathy?** Probably. I know that most people, even the ones who quite like me, didn't understand why I'd done it. Again, you've got to remember that I'm not net-friendly. The only real feedback I've ever had for my books... the only feedback... is what I've read in the reviews. And all the reviewers for the major fan-magazines, Dreamwatch and TV Zone and SFX and whatever, are all a bit conservative. Traditionalist Doctor Who people, like the whole DWM axis. Which means I've never done very well. I've never had more than an 8 out of 10 for a Doctor Who book, so statistically speaking even Christopher Bulis is doing better than me. When I wrote

INTERFERENCE, all I wanted to do was push things forward a bit, open the series up so everyone could go to new places with it. ALIEN BODIES had done pretty well in the SF press, eights rather than sevens, so I thought I had a mandate to keep doing the same thing. That was the important thing, I thought. Having a mandate. When the reviews for INTERFERENCE started turning up, I just felt... like I'd done something that shouldn't have been done. That I'd exceeded my authority, maybe. Reading that resignation message again, it looks to me like the kind of discussion you have with your partner just after you've had a big fight. You know. Well... I don't think there's any point going on with this relationship, do you?". That's how I felt. Now I've seen more of the internet, I realize that I did have a mandate to do what I did, but only from the point of view of one fan-faction. That was the faction I'd always been aiming for, though, so I suppose I should have kept my big mouth shut. INTERFERENCE has got a fair amount of support on the internet, from what I've seen. If I'd known that at the time, I never would have done anything as stupid as sending a resignation letter to people who basically quite like me." **But presumably it was the DWM review that was the final straw? From the message, that seemed to be the real problem.** Well... to be honest, that wasn't the worst review. The worst one was in SFX. **I don't think I saw it.** The reviewer said that the book hung together pretty well, and was fairly entertaining. He gave it three stars out of five. **That's a bad thing?** I wrote INTERFERENCE because I cared about it. It was a very personal experience, just the process of writing it changed me personally, and I don't give a toss how that sounds, it's true. The idea of somebody being ambivalent towards it... I just found myself looking at this review and thinking, is that it? Is that how little difference it makes? And, more importantly: is that what you think I'm doing, just churning out Doctor Who filler like most of the PDAs are? I'm horrified by the idea that anyone might think I'm so casual. I do what I do because I mean it. A lot of the time, people who've reviewed my stuff... John Binns [former TV Zone reviewer] especially... have been critical of it being clever". John's perception seems to be that I sit there at my keyboard thinking, "hmm, what kind of intellectual self-referential themes can I work into the story today?". It never seems to strike these people that I do what I do because I care. I've never written anything to show off, not even CHRISTMAS, which was only that tangled and over-written because I was too young and stupid to know better. I've never rush-written a book, I've never written a book just for the money. Perhaps that's the problem. I care too much, I get too involved, and it turns me into a kind of zealot. At least Vanessa Bishop [in the DWM review] had the good grace not to be ambivalent. Incidentally, the funniest thing about me I've ever read in a review was Vanessa's critique of THE TAKING OF PLANET FIVE, where she said it was a story that the "originator" of the story arc... meaning me... "could never have written". That made me laugh out loud. TOP-5 is exactly the kind of book I'd write if I took all the safety-catches off. I think I'm kind of scared to do stories like that, because I secretly don't think people would understand them. It's just the irony of it. To an extent, I suppose INTERFERENCE was written down slightly so that the traditionalists could understand it, but possibly it backfired on me. I vow never to write down for anybody ever again." **But is it really true that all the magazine reviewers are traditionalists?" Isn't this two-faction idea a bit simplistic?"** I'd say it's true, though. It's yet another reason why the BBC Books are handicapped from the start. The reviews are like the Radio Times film guide, they give points for efficiency rather than inventiveness. It's like... LAST OF THE GADARENE got 10 out of 10 in Dreamwatch, because it was - quote - a perfect Pertwee". In other words, it's exactly like something that was on television thirty years ago. And that's meant to be a good thing, is it? If someone told me that one of my books was like a thirty-year-old TV programme, I'd slap them. No disrespect to Mark Gatiss, who was great in The League of Gentlemen and in Doctor Who Night and everything, but it's not hard doing a book like that. There's no imagination at work there, it's a bunch of set pieces just strung together in the most efficient way possible. I could probably rush off a book like that in about a week, if I didn't know better. So let's put this in perspective. Say you're a writer. You're going to write a Doctor Who book, and the only immediate feedback you're going to have comes from the magazine reviews. You've got a choice, then. You can write something daring and progressive over a course of months, something that does great new things with the continuity but runs the risk of getting an unsympathetic old-school reviewer

and ending up with a 6 out of 10. Alternatively, you can write something totally formulaic in a couple of weeks, but make it 100% efficient to hit just the right old-fashioned Doctor Who chord, and therefore guarantee at least one 9 out of 10 in the fan-press. Maybe even a 10. What do you do? You want positive feedback, you want people to like your material. So how likely is it that you're going to go with the "progressive" option? Not only is there no incentive to do anything original, there's a good chance you'll be punished for doing something original, that's all I'm saying. Is it any surprise that the series is in decline now? Is it any surprise that nobody's bothering to do anything that's actually good? This is another reason why I'm glad I found out about the internet polls, by the way. Because at least now I've got some backup for claiming to be good at my job. So I don't just sound sore about getting a long string of mediocre reviews." **You say you could do a typical PDA in a week. But is that really true, or an exaggeration? Surely it doesn't take that much longer to do a good 300-page book than a mediocre 300-page book?** Doesn't it? I don't know. Most of the time you spend writing a book is the time you spend working everything out, not the time you spent actually typing words. That's what I find, anyway, although apparently I'm quite a fast worker. As far as I'm concerned, if you stick with a format that's been tried and tested over decades you can run off a Doctor Who novel in no time. I'm always amazed by the PDAs. I just think to myself... is that it? Is that all it takes to impress people? **Are people actually impressed, though? Don't they recognize mediocre stories as filler?** Tell that to the DWM readers. And even the newsgroup-based readers, sometimes. Just look at THE WITCH-HUNTERS. **What's wrong with THE WITCH-HUNTERS?** Well... it's a bit rudimentary, isn't it? It's not terrible or anything. I think Steve Lyons could be a really good writer, if he bothered doing something interesting for once. CONUNDRUM was lovely. But I read THE WITCH-HUNTERS, and I thought... yeah, piece of piss. That's a two-week job, if you ask me. **So why do people like it? It's one of the most popular BBC books...** It's got that ahhhhhhh" factor, I suppose. The easiest way to get the audience on your side is by making them feel sorry for a character. The witch-hunts are very emotive, there's a lot of human tragedy there. It's not real emotion, though, is it? It's just the basics. People love a bit of tragedy." **Is that true? Conventional wisdom says people like happy endings.** Twaddle. Shagger Cornell said the same thing when he started writing THE SHADOWS OF AVALON, and he was wrong as well. People love tragedy. Look at the facts. DEAD ROMANCE: my most popular book, among those who've read it, and it's a tragedy on a massive scale. HUMAN NATURE: Paul's most popular book, probably the most popular Seventh Doctor novel, and it's essentially the story of a doomed love affair. Titanic: most successful movie ever made. Love Story: first ever queue-round-the-building blockbuster. Hamlet and King Lear: two of the most well-known stories in the western world. When it's done properly, tragedy's the most popular kind of fiction, I'd say. **Why did Paul Cornell make a statement like that? What was the context?** Oh, it was all to do with the ending of SHADOWS OF AVALON. Stephen Cole wanted something very dark and operatic, with the Time Lords trying to... violate the reborn Compassion, but Paul wouldn't play it that way. He said his beloved audience would hate it, because they preferred feel-good fiction. Bollocks. What the Doctor Who readers don't like, what they react badly to, is mass slaughter. Jim Mortimore isn't particularly well-liked as a writer, despite the obvious talent there, because he takes a historical viewpoint. Individuals aren't important, the way he does things, so there are characters getting killed off left, right and centre. And that's not a very Doctor Who kind of attitude. Real human tragedy, on the other hand, works very well. But Paul refused to acknowledge that, and it's one of the reasons why THE SHADOWS OF AVALON is such a mess, I think. It's this vast operatic story, but he keeps copping out to give the audience touchy-feely feel-good moments. The most telling thing is the way the interior of Compassion-TARDIS is described at the end. I was the one who did the original designs for that, and the way I wrote it Compassion's internal space was supposed to be quite scary, it was like being stuck inside somebody else's head. Everything was slightly off-centre. When Paul finished the book, there was a big compromise there. Some of the interior was scary, but then there were these ridiculous brightly-coloured signs with bubble-writing on, and things like that. It sums up the whole story. He made Compassion as schizophrenic as the rest of the book. I mean, I always hate it when people play up to their audience like that. A decent writer

shouldn't even be able to say a sentence like oh, but the fans will hate it...". It's like I said earlier, if I did one bad thing with INTERFERENCE it was not going the whole way, it was writing down just in case some people got left behind. Stupid move." **Is there a personal agenda here, though? How much of the Compassion plot was your idea?** Pretty much all of it. You know how Paul turned on me recently in that interview he did? I thought that was bloody typical. I gave him the one interesting plot element in AVALON, and I didn't even get proper credit for it. Without the Compassion thing, it would've just been a shite book about faeries. As it was, it was a shite book about faeries with a horribly botched ending, but at least it was an improvement. **Paul Cornell's criticism of you was that you'd broken the Doctor Who writer's code by criticizing other writers. Fair, do you think?** Fair. But I don't remember signing any official agreement when Virgin signed me up. Nobody told me about this code". The thing is... I've got a reputation as one of the most arrogant people in the whole of fandom, and it's kind of funny. If you want to know what "arrogant" means, my God... you make a criticism of Gary Russell or Paul Cornell or someone, they never forget and they never forgive you for it. The word "bitch" isn't big enough for what these people do. And you should hear the abuse I've had over the last couple of years. But unlike 90% of the other writers, it doesn't really bother me. I still hang around with people who've been completely insulting. The problem is, I don't have a sense of diplomacy, that's all. I don't have any tact. The other writers bitch about each other behind their backs, whereas I just come out and say what I think. That's the problem Paul has with me, I think. Oh, and I don't have tits." **...?** I've tried to be nice to him. I've always tried. But if he can't shag you, he's just not interested. The only sure-fire way to get on that man's good side is by having XX chromosomes. He's never had any patience with me at all. That was the really funny thing about that interview he did, where he started slagging me off. He said the politics in INTERFERENCE reminded him of a seventeen-year-old virgin". It was just so telling, because what he's actually saying there, when it comes down to it, is: "I'm wiser than you are because I've shagged more birds." I mean, fair enough, he probably has had sex with more people than I have. His exploits are far more legendary than mine. I just thought that was a very funny attitude, coming from someone who calls me a misogynist." **Why does he think you're a misogynist?** Because of my fanzine. The one I give out at the Tavern. I keep taking the piss out of Kate Orman, so in Shagger Cornell's world that means I hate women. It's the way things work on his planet. All right, let's get down to basics here. We're talking about a man who spends his life acting like a caring, sharing new man just so he can get into the pants of as many women as possible. And this isn't just me being bitter, some of Paul's own friends told me this about him even before I'd met the man. In a court of law, the character witnesses would be lined up around the building three-deep. And I'm a misogynist for having a go at Kate Orman. This is getting really personal now, isn't it? Maybe we should go back to focusing on Krotons. **Maybe not. There was recently a big fight about the Paul Cornell interview on the newsgroups, in which Kate Orman and Jon Blum got personally involved. Is there a kind of power-block thing going on here? Paul and his friends against you and your friends?** I don't have any friends. Not among the writers. You've got to remember, the writers are so stuck-up it's funny, they do a Cornell on you if you even dare to suggest there was anything wrong with their last book. The readers aren't like that. When the debate started on the newsgroup... was it Jade Pagoda, somewhere like that?... the way I heard it, while the authors were getting uptight about it all the readers were just egging them on, going yeah, go on, have a fight". The readers like seeing the writers twat each other, because they know that, by and large, the writers need a good slap every now and then. It's like that fanzine of mine. Cornell reads it and starts whining about how nasty it is, but as soon as he turns his back all his friends start giggling about it. I should know, I've seen them. And after Paul turned on me, I specifically went out of my way to make sure the next issue of the fanzine was as offensive and unacceptable as possible. Issue eight was completely horrible, it was going too far even by my standards. But nobody has ever complained about it on the newsgroups. Why? Because everyone who got a copy thinks it's funny, and they're just not telling the other writers about it. As for the Kate Orman thing... I think she and Jon take the whole fandom thing much too seriously, really. I've been calling Mark Clapham an arse to his face for ages, but when I said it on the

internet Kate started going on about how it was a shame that a professional writer should start flaming other people blah blah blah etcetera etcetera. It's nothing, it's trivia. God knows enough people have come up to me and started telling me what's wrong with INTERFERENCE." **What do they say is wrong with INTERFERENCE?** That it's too long, usually. I used to ask them how much shorter it should be, but I've given up now. They normally say something like about a book". Actually, did I say I didn't have any friends among the writers? That's not true. I'm still on good terms with Jim Mortimore. Who's also in exile from Doctor Who. Says it all, really." **Do you actually like anybody else's books?** There's almost nothing I like in the BBC range, it's true. THE TAKING OF PLANET FIVE is good, ZETA MAJOR's quite entertaining. Oh, and then there's Jim's stuff, EYE OF HEAVEN and CAMPAIGN, which I have read and which is blatantly better than anything else BBC Books have put out this year. But the Virgin novels were something else entirely. By my reckoning, about one in every five of the Seventh Doctor books was a classic Doctor Who story, and that's an incredible turn-out when you think about it. **Possibly the reason you've attracted so much criticism is that you keep attacking the sacred cows of Doctor Who fiction - Now you're just trying to trick me into talking about Kate Orman in the same sentence as sacred cows".** I've been set up like this before. It's entrapment, and I'm not falling for it." **I was about to ask... who do you think is the most overrated Doctor Who writer? Seeing as there are so many of them, according to you.** Matthew Jones! Ha-haah! Both his books are bollocks, and people still can't see through them. Actually... it's great being able to come out and say this. I used to have to be really diplomatic about Matt's stuff all the time, because he's a big important script-editor man these days and I once submitted a TV script to him. But he hated it, and I'm not likely to try again, so I can say what I like. Wheeeee! **But BAD THERAPY is remembered as one of the seminal NAs...** Yeah, well, there's two reasons for that. For one thing, it's the first time most people found out about Roz dying. It's a huge impact, coming at the start of the book the way it does. TIME FLIGHT would probably be remembered as a classic if EARTHSHOCK hadn't been transmitted on time. The other thing is, people are really gullible when it comes to in-depth characterization" stories. The easiest way to get an audience on your side is by coming up with these poxy little characters who've had major traumas in their lives, and spinning the whole story around that. Right at the start of BAD THERAPY, we're introduced to this human protagonist character... God knows what he's called... who's this teenager trying to come to terms with his sexuality in the harsh and prejudiced world of the 1950s. Or whenever it's set, I forget. So immediately, the audience goes "ahhhhhhh". It's like what I said about THE WITCH-HUNTERS, it's the literary equivalent of saying "look at the lovely little kitten!". And all Matthew Jones' characters are like that, they're these crap little demographically-targeted stereotypes. Any bugger can do that, but it's the worst kind of writing there is. And BAD THERAPY is a bloody badly-written novel. Even apart from the fact that it's just a bunch of set pieces looking for somewhere to happen. Even apart from the fact that the plot structure doesn't work, and the heroes let the villain just walk off on two separate occasions so that he can come back and menace them later on. Even apart from the fact that it's got the most laughable cop-out ending of the whole series. Even apart from the fact that Peri turns up just as a random piece of fan-wank. Am I getting the point across, d'you think?" **Let's go back to this script. Matthew Jones rejected something you wrote, is that it?** Yep. So this is all going to sound like pure bitterness on my part, isn't it? I thought I was onto a winner there. I thought, if anyone in television's going to like what I want to do, it's going to be him. Stupid thing to think, that. Shows I'm not a professional. **What did you write? And why didn't he like it?** It was... wait a minute, let me make something clear here. I'm quite prepared to accept that the script I did may have been complete cack. I'd never written a script before, I didn't know where to start, it was probably all a bit of a mess. No argument with the man for rejecting me. It was his reasons I found a bit worrying. Basically... it was a script for an action serial. Can I start by explaining what's wrong with television? **If you like/ But we're getting short on tape.** All right. The thing is, people in television... and I'm not criticizing Matthew Jones now, this is a general thing... people in television only know other people in television. They're out of contact with anything other than the culture of TV production. I mean, let's look at it in terms any fanboy can understand. TV

companies are absolutely certain, completely sure, that people don't like... say... science-fiction. And yet, at the same time, almost every major movie success over the last few years has been an SF movie. The Phantom Menace, The Matrix, Men in Black... and in a wider context, let's forget about SF and see the bigger picture. Every recent major movie I can think of has been an adventure story. People love to go to the cinema to watch adventures. Why? Bloody easy to see why. There aren't any adventure stories on television any more. Detective thrillers, grittily realistic dramas, horrible flatshare comedies... hundreds of them. Adventures? Bugger all, except things that get filed away on BBC2 at tea-time. And the reason's simple. TV people only know the TV people world, so the only kind of success they really understand... beyond even the ratings... is the approval of other TV people. If you make, say, a hard-hitting drama serial about the troubles in Northern Ireland... another one... then all your TV friends are going to slap you on the back for making such a bold artistic statement. But if you went and made the British equivalent of Xena: Warrior Princess, everyone would be a bit embarrassed. Just look at the figures. Reruns of SPEARHEAD FROM SPACE were getting higher audience turn-outs than The Priory on the other channel, but The Priory gets all the media exposure because... well, because everyone in the media knows Zoe Ball. The point I'm getting at is that a truly modern action-adventure serial... not SF, as such, but something that'd have the same cultural impact The Avengers had in the '60s... would be massive, if you did it properly. Nobody's going to do it, though, because nobody who works in TV wants the embarrassment factor. They cancelled the BBC2 run of Doctor Who and put on repeats of The Fresh Prince of Fucking Bel-Air, not because Will Fucking Smith gets higher ratings... he doesn't... but because he's not as embarrassing. Says the BBC. For God's sake, isn't it fairly obvious that it should have been us who came up with Buffy the Vampire Slayer? Massive international success, but if you'd taken it to the BBC they would have told you to piss off and leave them alone. It's what we do. It's what we do well. It's supposed to be ours. **So was that the script you wrote? A modern Avengers?** Yes, but at the time I didn't know enough about scriptwriting to pull it off. Like I said, I'm happy to admit that the script didn't work. But again, it's not the rejection that got me worried. It was Matt Jones' reasons for rejecting it. That scared me off television forever. **What were his reasons?** Well, there's the specifics and the overall view. The biggest individual problem, he said, was that the characters were... hang on, what was the word? Superficial, I think he said. The characters were superficial. And I thought... yes, of course they were. That's how adventure stories work. Great TV programmes don't work through in-depth characterization, they work through being iconic. Doesn't matter what kind of adventure it is, the rules are always the same. The lead characters are great symbols. If you tried dissecting their psyches, they'd fall to bits in a second. And then it occurred to me... the programmes Matt's working on now are things like Love in the Twenty-First Century. You get tons of programmes like that these days. It's the This Life influence. All these terrible, horrible shows about whining middle-class professionals having personal crises and talking over their relationships with each other. By the way, did you see the episode of Love in the Twenty-First Century that Shagger Cornell wrote? God almighty. My mother - my own mother - saw it, and described it as... quote... "fucking awful". Anyway, the point is this. Modern TV makers think these whining, petty characters make great television. And I'd rather chew my foot off that write something like that. Whenever some new TV company talks about resurrecting Doctor Who, they always start using phrases like "character-driven", don't they? God save us from character-driven TV, I say. Great television runs on iconography, not on giving characters stock emotional problems and letting them drone on about them for hours on end." **You're saying that Matthew Jones doesn't understand this, but that doesn't make sense. Matthew Jones is a Doctor Who fan, surely?** Not the point. He's in TV now. Part of the TV people world. Let me explain, just so people don't think this is sour grapes. And let me emphasize again that my script probably was crap, I'm not arguing about that. The thing is, it worried me. The rejection letter began with something like... I can't remember the exact words... ah, the script reminded me of the old days when I used to write New Adventures". And throughout the rest of the text, there was this underlying assumption that the New Adventures were somehow an inferior thing. You just got this constant impression that, yes, he really was a bit embarrassed about this whole Doctor Who thing in his past.

That's what I mean about finding his reasons scary. Let's keep one thing in mind here. Matt wrote an episode of Love in the Twenty-First Century, and a couple of million people saw it. Pretty big audience, compared to the readership of BEYOND THE SUN or something. But people are still going to care about BEYOND THE SUN for years to come, like it or not. And five minutes after his TV show ended, barely anybody in the world gave a toss any more. That's the real crux of what I'm getting at here. When you go to the TV world, you forget what's important because you're playing by the rules of all the other TV people. I mean, I've learned a lot since I wrote that script. I know how things work now, and if nothing else I hope I've convinced people that I'm a fairly smart and fairly competent writer. Knowing what I know now, it'd be a piece of piss to get into television, or at least get as far as the development stage. All I'd have to do is write a sex-heavy comedy-drama about a bunch of twentysomethings sharing a flat in London. I could do it tomorrow. No problem at all. But I would, quite simply, rather die. I want to do things people will care about. Things that are iconic. Things that matter." **You're only telling half the story, though. Red Productions also made Queer as Folk, and that does matter, in the way you mean. Millions of people across the world cared about it.** Oh, yes. It was very good indeed. But that's just the thing. I think... I think.. that the TV people see a completely different show to the rest of us. Queer as Folk is brilliant because it is iconic. The characters are symbols. It doesn't matter where you live or what your sexuality is, within twenty minutes of the first episode you know who all the characters are. They're not deep. You know why Stuart does what he does. You know how Vince is going to react to any given situation. You know where Nathan's heading. Straight away, they become as mythic... as brilliantly, inspirationally shallow... as characters out of Shakespeare or Dickens. And yet, I'd bet all the money I own that the people in the production office think they're making a character-driven" programme. It works, it works brilliantly... the first series did, anyway... but I'm pretty sure they don't know why it works. After all, they're only TV people. The one episode that does try to do in-depth psychological-background character-building, the one where Stuart goes back to see his family for the first time, is the really crap, boring one that everybody fast-forwards through on video. I stand by every word I said. Iconic TV works. That's why Queer as Folk worked. Do you know much about Chuck Jones?" **The cartoon man?** He created Road Runner. When people think about cartoons, nine times out of ten they think about Warner Brothers cartoons. When they think about Warner Brothers cartoons, nine times out of ten they think about the ones made by Chuck Jones. All the things we think we know about the Warner Brothers universe... the nature of Bugs Bunny, the nature of Daffy Duck, the rules of the chase as applied to Wile E. Coyote... they're all down to Chuck Jones. He didn't invent all the characters, but he defined most of them. He deliberately and consciously honed in on what made the characters work, on their most primal dynamics. The Bugs and Daffy cartoons that stick in people's minds are almost all his. Then he did the same strip-down job to the cartoon medium as a whole, and the result was the original Road Runner series. Road Runner is culture in its purest form... I'm sorry, I've just realized how stupid that sounds. Never mind, it's true anyway. It's the whole cartoon medium in a nutshell, boiled down to one never-ending chase with rules that feel like they're instinctive to us these days. Nobody seems to have noticed that Chuck Jones quite simply created the most powerful and inescapable myth of the twentieth century. Because when you get down to the fundamental truth of an idea, you've got something that's got power. Genuine power. People sometimes talk about this in a very disparaging way, like it's a case of bringing things down to the lowest common denominator, but that's the opposite of what you're doing. It's like you're honing the culture to a razor-sharp point. You're creating something that's primal and... kind of dangerous. Myths... real myths, not that wanky market-driven Anne-Rice-stroke-Neil-Gaiman shite you get these days... aren't stereotypes or cliches. They're just inescapable, which is why Chuck Jones is possibly the greatest creative genius who ever lived. And yes, the characters out of Queer as Folk are minor myths as well. Their environment's quite a specific one, but the same principles apply. I mean, they should last a decade or two. Wile E. Coyote will probably survive for centuries. **Is this the reason you do what you do? Do you want to make myths that survive?** Yes. It'll take a while for me to learn how to do it, though. Obviously, the problem with the Doctor Who books is that it's such a small field. Not just in the sense that the

audience is a bit on the small side, but... you're limited in what you can do. It's a finite universe, other writers define the limits of it. I suppose it's a kind of training-ground, really. I learned to write there. CHRISTMAS ON A RATIONAL PLANET is okay, but it's not great. You can tell it's a first-time novel. Very clunky. I think I can honestly say that every book I've done has been better than the previous one, even down to the fact that INTERFERENCE 2 is marginally better than INTERFERENCE 1. It's a learning-curve for me. I'd be bloody disappointed if I peaked now. **So you say INTERFERENCE is better than ALIEN BODIES?** By a long shot. I don't know how anyone can think otherwise. ALIEN BODIES was my first real book, it was the point where I took myself off automatic and realized where I was going wrong. For the first two, I was just writing books because I could. The idea of doing something better never crossed my mind. I remember seeing CHRISTMAS rated as something like the eighteenth-best NA in the rankings chart, and thinking, yeah, that's fair enough". How the hell can you set your sights that low? So anyway, ALIEN BODIES was when I worked out what I wanted to do, and because of that it's kind of only halfway there. It's very patchy, especially in the flashback sequences. I think I was just knackered. The flashbacks were written last, because I didn't want to break the flow of the main plotline, and by that point I'd been writing pretty solidly for about six months. I finished DOWN... which was 360 pages to start with, I overwrote horribly... then went straight into a 40-page story for a Decalog, then went straight into ALIEN BODIES. By the time the flashbacks came around, I'd written 700-odd pages without taking a break longer than a day. I was running out of words, and I think it shows. I could do it twice as well now. Wait a minute... no, I'd like to retract what I said earlier. I do know why someone would prefer ALIEN BODIES to INTERFERENCE. My own argument works against me, doesn't it? ALIEN BODIES works because it's mythic. A lot more mythic than INTERFERENCE is." **Deliberately so?** It was one of the things fuelling the book [i.e. ALIEN BODIES], I think. Every great myth has got an endpiece to it. Arthur has to put the sword back in the lake, Robin has to do that firing-an-arrow-to-mark-his-burial-place thing. But here was the Doctor, the great British myth of the twentieth century, and he'd never had a Gotterdammerung waiting for him down the line. ALIEN BODIES was kind of necessary, I thought, as a back cover" to the legend. The point where it ends, at some time in the future. It's a very mythic thing to do, whereas INTERFERENCE... which is a lot more personal, and it's certainly a much better-written book... doesn't really bother with the myth thing so much." **There's the ending, though. The Nelson-like fall of the Third Doctor. That's mythic.** I suppose. To an extent. I thought it should be done for the same reason that the ending of EARTHSHOCK had to be done. When you watched Doctor Who as a kid, it kind of lost some of its edge from the start, because you knew for a fact how things were going to turn out. The Doctor's always going to survive, and so are his companions. But then EARTHSHOCK comes along, and changes everything. From that moment on, you're never quite sure if you're on safe ground. It's the reason I still quite like it, despite the plot loopholes the size of Canada and the crap macho dialogue. It's like EARTHSHOCK justifies the whole existence of programme. And I've always felt that the Missing Adventures... or PDAs, or whatever you want to call them... have got a similar problem. The Doctor can't die. The companions must live. We know the future, it's not even an issue. That was why I did what I did in INTERFERENCE. Even if they don't like it, I hope people realize there's a purpose behind it all. It's suppose to justify the existence of the PDAs. From that point on, you can never be sure what the outcome's going to be. I didn't do it out of malice. And I certainly didn't do it to take the piss out of PLANET OF THE SPIDERS. **It strikes me that you've got a very Faction Paradox attitude towards the mythology. The idea that change in itself makes things more valuable.** I suppose so. It didn't occur to me at the time. Somebody on the newsgroups suggested that you can think of Faction Paradox as being the living embodiments of post-modernism, and I kind of like that. Bit Pseud's Corner, maybe, but it's near the mark. Mark Clapham once said that he thought the ending of INTERFERENCE copped out, because after the Doctor's shot the Faction people turn up and reaffirm that everything's going to turn out more or less all right. The whole of the Baker run still happens, in other words. But I'd like people to bear in mind, when I wrote it I thought I'd be doing more Doctor Who stuff. As it turned out, I never got to write BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE SPIDERS, or that REQUIEM thing, and I never got to explain that things really aren't all right. And now

everything's being reset again in THE ANCESTOR CELL, so please don't blame me. I had reasons, that's all I want people to remember. Similarly, I had a very good reason for bringing in I. M. Foreman in the Dust storyline. I told David Darlington [interviewer for DWM] that I did a Foreman story because somebody had to do it, and I think he misunderstood what I meant by that. I didn't mean the continuity was gagging for it, I didn't mean it was a hole that needed filling. It had to be done for a sense of closure. With the INTERFERENCE arc, it looked like the Doctor was finally going to shed all his skins and go off on a new path. New motivations, new TARDIS, new everything. And that's exactly what's happening now, although Justin's future isn't quite the one I'd been expecting. I. M. Foreman is the oldest legend in the canon, it's the oldest unanswered question of the Doctor Who universe. By finally bringing the series full-circle like that, you're performing a kind of going-away ritual. That was what I thought was necessary. But I kind of fucked it up a bit. **In what way?** I. M. Foreman just isn't a very good character. The blindfolded version isn't, anyway. I like the female version, I like the Number Thirteen version, but the central leader" persona isn't really up to scratch. He's meant to be this great mythic figure, we've been waiting to see him for years, but when he shows up he's just a generic trickster-archetype thing. Which is a reasonable plot device for the story I'm telling, but it still looks a bit weak to me. That's the one thing about INTERFERENCE I'd like to do again." **What should he be like?** I'm not sure. I could have written him as some great baptist swamp-preacher, in that American Deep South style. That'd fit the Dust setting quite well, I think. Do him as this hellfire-and-damnation Gallifreyan priest. Alternatively... still in Deep South mode... it might've been nice to do him as a fat black guy in a rocking-chair. The old classic American story-teller figure. Kind of like that character in the Harry Hill programme, you know? Weeeeeeeeeeeell, Mister Fitz Kreiner, there was nothin' he liked more than to play his gee-tar..." **I think we should start to wind it up there.** Why, because I've started doing comedy accents? **Mainly.** Fair enough. **One more question needs asking. If you're really not going to write any more Doctor Who books, then what are you doing now?** I'm writing for Faction Paradox, thankyou very much. It's like I said. We take the best bits of what we've done so far, and we move on. **So you don't feel that the Faction's too close to Doctor Who?** No. I'm too much of a monomaniac, probably. While I was writing INTERFERENCE, I think I started to realize that I didn't really want to write about the Doctor any more. I was more interested in the universe around him, and as it was my book that meant the little sub-bubble universe I'd built up since ALIEN BODIES. Which isn't really the Doctor Who universe at all, of course, although it does owe a huge debt to Robert Holmes. So I feel very very comfortable writing stories set in that universe which don't, for example, contain the word TARDIS. Besides, I think Faction Paradox have done their bit in the novels. It would've been terrible, to keep inflicting them on people who just wanted a Doctor story rather than a time-travelling voodoo-cult story. **Will this be a novel, a series of novels, or what?** I don't know. I feel like... I can't explain it very well. When I started putting together the Faction's world, it was... like I was on the edge of reaching something. It's like I said earlier, about big myths. There's something there. Something very big and very important. Important to me, I mean. I get the sense that this is what I've been aiming at all the time, but... I don't know how to get a handle on it yet. I feel as though the Faction Paradox thing will be the most important thing I do, but I don't think that means I'll have an instant best-seller on my hands. I think it means that ten years from now, I'm suddenly going to get the hang of it and finally hit the nerve. Maybe as a book, or a script, or... I don't know. It'll take me a while to get it right, that's what I'm saying. For the time being, though, it looks like BBV's going to be where it's developed. **As an audio?** Yeah. I told Stephen [Cole?] that a few weeks ago, and he just laughed. I think there's the sense that BBV's the bastard runt sibling of Big Finish. Because they both do this Doctor Who derivative stuff, but Big Finish were the ones who ended up with the license. So BBV isn't taken very seriously by some people, I don't think. I know I've had a lot of flack for it. Slagging off Gary Russell on one hand, and saying that I wouldn't be seen dead working for Big Finish, then going straight to the competition who are supposed to have an even smaller... I don't know what you'd call it. Powerbase, maybe. **So why are you doing it?** Because BBV want to do it. Because I've found somewhere where I can do what I want, and do it properly. No Doctor, no fan-wank, no fan-politics. And the distribution's going to be smaller

than any of the books I did for the BBC, but so what? It's going to be good anyway. It wasn't until I started writing the first Faction script for BBV that I figured it all out. What it meant. Why I was doing it. Where I was going. I get to write the scripts I've always wanted to write, get paid for them, and figure out how my universe works in the process. Sorted. Respect due. **The obvious question is... if THE ANCESTOR CELL's got the Faction in it, will the continuities match?** I doubt it. I did try asking Stephen what he was going to do, but he wouldn't tell me. He said he'd put in a reference to my first BBV script, if I told him what to write. I told him to sod off. Typical, isn't it? He goes and nicks my story concept, then he messes up my nice new continuity. He'd better not have Grandfather Paradox show up, that's all. I've got a nasty feeling about a title like THE ANCESTOR CELL". It'd be like having Judge Dredd take his hat off or something."

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