

# Hub

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Editors: Lee Harris and Alasdair Stuart.  
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## **NEWS** - British Fantasy Society Open Night in York – October 2007

On Saturday October 13<sup>th</sup>, *Hub* is playing host to an Open Night for the *British Fantasy Society*. Held at York Brewery, the Open Night welcomes both members and non-members alike – if you're interested in Fantasy or Horror, feel free to come along! We just need to know how many of you are coming so we can make appropriate arrangements with the brewery.

As well as socialising with like-minded people, there is also the option to be part of a private tour of the brewery (a small charge will apply for this).

Full details over at [www.hub-mag.co.uk/bfs](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk/bfs)

York's a great place to visit. We hope to see you there!

## A Brief History of Slip-Time

by Mikal Trimm



Jack Dunny felt the sudden sweat and clammy-palmed anxiety that came with the time-shift, and he jumped to his feet and into motion immediately. His surroundings blurred as he stood, the passers-by leaving snail trails of themselves behind them, until they resolved finally into statues. The wind ceased; birds hung in the air, frozen in defiance of gravity.

Jack moved in an erratic-yet-effective pattern developed through years of practice. *That* lady, the one with the tiny designer handbag dangling casually from her well-manicured hands -- he loosened her stiff grip with a quick wrench, rifled through her purse, and found a twenty stuffed between her credit cards. *That* man, wearing a designer jogging outfit even though he plainly never sweated on purpose -- Jack popped the back of the man's right shoe down to find the expected clip of folded bills wedged into his sock. And so he went, from purse to pocket through the quiescent crowd, ignoring jewelry for the immediacy of folding cash.

There was a time when, crow-like, he snatched at every shiny bauble. It only took one near-arrest when he tried to pawn a hot Rolex for him to give up that particular obsession. Now he focused on money. Hard, untraceable cash, nothing like it.

A beautiful young thing waited to cross the street, model-quality -- hell, in this city she might even *be* a model -- and the old passions took over. He paused to cup a breast...

...and it was back to high-school. The first few times the talent displayed itself, Jack had panicked, sure that the world was ending, or at least *his* world. Everything slowed and stopped, and Jack would huddle on the ground, an ungainly fetus, waiting for the Judgment. Once he realized that time seemed to stop for everyone *except* himself during his 'glory moments', he gave full vent to his hormones. Taking advantage of the stillness, he charged into the girls' locker room, ready to exploit the inevitable congruence of his uncontrollable ability and blessed fate.

He found himself, zero-hour, in the girls' showers, surrounded by the discovered country of flesh. He pictured an orgy of bliss, a hand-picked feast of pleasure. He would be Jack-in-whomever's-box he chose, and not one of these helpless meat-statues could stop him. He spent several minutes running from girl to girl, stroking nipples, groping crotches, before he realized that this *wasn't going to work*. The girls remained in position, a fistful of Venuses, seemingly unmoved by his attentions. Jack was hard and ready, but they were just *hard*. Warm, yes, soft and smooth on the surface, but they didn't *yield*. Beneath the silk of their skin, they were little more than statues, ready to pose, endlessly, under his fevered gaze.

Stymied in his lust, he felt the nausea that he'd learned to associate with the end of his episodes, and he ran, not noticing the crystalline mist from the showers as it bounced from his shoulders like tiny diamonds, not noticing the girl he shoved on his way out as she tilted slowly and began an arrested fall...

...and now he pulled his hand quickly away from the soft marble of this untouchable mannequin and ran, stuffing money underneath his tattered clothing, managing to get to his comfortable spot at his favorite street corner before the stomach cramps set in. He didn't notice the stray bills falling behind him in slow-motion as the world woke up; he collapsed into his corner, shoving dollars and twenties and the occasional fifty beneath his thrift-store clothes,

letting them mingle with the mossy remnants of other sweat-soaked, grimy fragments of legal tender that coated and stained his body.

And as the world snapped back into place around him, he settled again into his nest of newspapers and deli-wrap. He didn't even notice when he began shouting his mantra to the people that walked past him, unseeing:

"My time. Not your time. *My time!* My own time! *I own time!*"

#

The second hand of the ancient clock in the office slowed, stopped.

Lydia Singleton felt time halt; she spat reflexively, clearing her throat of the bitter taste that foreshadowed her reign.

She stood slowly, regally, looking down on her captured co-workers with disdain. Flouncing her long skirts with an actor's flourish, she got down to business.

*Jimmy.* Next cubicle to hers, laughing-boy Jimmy. Always had a kicker for every comment, always a punch-line for every joke. She almost giggled at her good fortune. Jimmy held a cup of coffee half-way to his mouth, and she pursed her lips delicately as Jimmy's favorite song echoed in her head: *Lydia, oh Lydia, oh have you seen Lydia, Lydia the tattooed lady...*

She spat in his coffee. Then she wandered off to find her next victim.

*Darla.* Oh, yes, the Whore of the Third Floor. Darla wore the tightest blouses allowed in the workplace, the shortest skirts allowed by Nature, and the sleaziest undergarments found in any mail-order catalogue. She bent over when kneeling would suffice and knelt whenever a man passed by at the right altitude. She also evidenced a seeming grasp of office politics, which made her more than a bimbo, as far as Lydia was concerned.

It made Darla a *problem*.

Lydia clutched her weapon. After all the years of blank-time, as she thought of it, she'd learned a thing or two. *You can't move anyone, not much. You can't put anyone in compromising situations, even if you would love to have that much control, because they were too hard to budge, first, and more importantly, you never knew when time would come back.*

Instead, you could find a way to manipulate small things. Like, say, a letter-opener. Sharpened.

Lydia walked up to Darla, silent Darla, *immobile* Darla, and, with the determination of a queen, popped the buttons of Darla's blouse. Grunting with the effort of affecting the placid world around her, she sawed through the front strap of Darla's bra.

*If you've got it, flaunt it, right, Darla?* Lydia turned and walked away, dismissing Darla with a flip of her wrist.

Ever mindful of her personal anti-clock, she moved on, saving her sweetest moment for last, as usual. She approached Him.

Daniel. *Preacher-boy*, as she thought of him. Or *Mr. All-Is-Well*, or *Mr. Happy-Family*, or *Mr. Meet-My-Savior*, depending on her mood. Lydia loathed him. God was his security blanket, Christ his pacifier. Nothing fazed the man; he met every hardship, every downturn in life, with the same Pollyanna attitude, and it sickened her.

*God is watching us, my ass.* Lydia smiled to herself as she ran a hand teasingly across his stiff shoulders. *Is He watching this, I wonder,* she thought as she pulled a hair from her head, checking to make sure it wasn't one of the grey ones, and laid it carefully across the back of his coat. *Or better yet, this?* She bent down beside Daniel and managed to tug the collar of his tan shirt up a bit, leaving it exposed beyond the neck of his sports coat. Gently, she brushed the collar with her lips, leaving a subtle-yet-telling trace of lipstick. She then forced the collar back down below the neckline of his jacket. *Forget God. You don't have to explain anything to Him. Just explain it to your wife.*

Satisfied, Lydia returned to her desk. She felt the bitter taste of bile in the back of her throat as she sat, indicating that blank-time was over. For a moment, she swallowed reflexively, hot saliva assaulting her mouth as she fought to keep from vomiting. Then the second hand on the clock stirred, jerked, and came awake again.

Lydia popped a breath mint and smiled to herself. She waited anxiously for Darla's screams.

#

Jason Wesselman felt the coppery tang of adrenaline, and the world paused for him. He smiled, letting the buzz run through his body; then he went to work.

*This is where the fun starts.*

Adjusting his backpack, he examined his surroundings with an artist's eye, inspecting the snapshot of life around him for hidden meaning. He thought of pulling out his sketchbook, decided to wait a while -- he had enough material at home for several illustrations. Right now he craved *action*. Sometimes he saw something immediately; other times he found himself searching in vain as his precious moments in slip-time ticked away.

He thought of it as slip-time -- that period when he somehow managed to slip between two isolated moments in reality, as if life were a movie and he had inserted himself between two frames of the film. When it had happened to him the first time, years ago, he'd merely wandered aimlessly, caught up in the miraculous: a dog, frozen in mid-leap to catch a Frisbee, the disc itself halted in mid-spin; a fountain in the park that spewed perfect globes, each filled with a tiny version of the world around them; a squirrel caught hovering between two branches. Once he realized that the miracle planned on repeating itself on a regular basis, though, he started questioning things. *Why is this happening to me?*, and, more importantly, *what am I supposed to do about this?*

Maybe he'd read too many comics as a kid, but the answers seemed obvious. *I've been given a Power; I need to learn to use it.*

He felt foolish the first few times he tried, like a kid playing superhero -- he had an inane desire to tie a sheet around his neck. But he experimented with his ability, and he learned exactly how limited his self-appointed role of savior was.

It was very hard to affect his surroundings in slip-time. Even inanimate objects were burdensome to control, and people were extremely tenacious; it took an enormous amount of energy to cause even the smallest effect on a person. He almost gave up on the idea completely, but his helplessness ate at him constantly, a puzzle demanding a solution.

Eventually, he learned to think small. He couldn't stop the purse-snatching, already in progress, that he noticed one day, but he *could*, with a clumsy-but-effective roundhouse kick, displace the thief's planted foot a few inches. When time reasserted itself, the man tripped and fell full-force into the pavement; the purse flew from his hand with the impact. Jason watched from the sidelines, giddy, as the woman grabbed her purse and beat the man across the head and shoulders with it while onlookers laughed in delight.

Now Jason viewed the world with a well-honed sense of perspective; the ability to see something out-of-place became almost instinctive. Today he was out taking a walk near his house, which was tucked into a quiet suburb with very little crime. Still, he felt the sense of discomfort he'd learned to trust when his eyes identified a problem that his brain had not yet recognized.

It was a typical Sunday afternoon. Dogs chased cats, lawn mowers chased grasshoppers, and children chased --

He saw it. Several children, five or six years old tops, playing with a ball in someone's front yard, the ball rolling toward the street, one girl racing desperately after it, a minivan about to cross its path. Jason couldn't judge speed with everything in suspension, and he'd never been any great shakes at physics, anyway. Would the ball reach the street? Would the girl reach the ball? Would the van reach the girl?

Jason didn't really care. The *possibility* was there. Why take chances? He crossed the street and, with a forceful kick, adjusted the ball's trajectory. When slip-time ended, the ball would give a little bounce, maybe, and roll back to the children and away from the street. No big deal. No one would even notice.

And that was the part Jason liked the most.

His early ideas about superheroes had been vanquished long ago. Now, he just did what he could. He caused no harm and hoped that he helped someone every now and then, but he didn't even wait around to see the results anymore. It seemed egotistical.

As he walked away, he thought of his grandmother. Whenever some near-catastrophe was narrowly averted, she'd say, "Well, looks like someone has a guardian angel around!" Jason liked that. He often wondered if there were others like him, others that could fall out of time and work a little magic on the world around them. Not superheroes, but *guardian angels*, maybe. Lots of them, all around, never noticed, but *there*, invisible. *Persistent*. Always looking out for others.

*After all*, he thought as he relaxed into the comfortable tiredness he always felt when slip-time ended, *what else would you do?*

2.

Lydia hated looking for work. She roamed the city streets as if expecting someone to stop her, hug her to his breast, and scream, "Dear God! You're just the employee I've been searching for!"

In her worldview, at least, that's the way it should happen.

The crappy thing about all this, the thing that really just *pissed her off* about the whole matter, was that she didn't even get fired this time. The Big Kahunas decided to close down shop on her whole branch office due to poor performance. Within six months of the time they'd hired her on, production dropped nearly fifty percent, and the use of sick leave doubled, while management seemed to lose all interest in controlling spiraling costs.

She blamed it all on Daniel. After his wife left him he'd lost all business-sense, the weak bastard. Everyone else in the office took advantage of it, what with their 'illness due to emotional stress' or pathetic little outbreaks of paranoia. Hell, as far as she was concerned they all *deserved* to get the boot, the way they acted.

But damn it, *her* performance was just fine, thank you very much. She just got lumped in with the losers. Again.

And now, here she was, plodding through areas of the city she'd never deigned to visit before, looking for some damn office with an address that didn't actually seem to exist. All because everyone else around her couldn't do their *jobs*. Just thinking about it made her want to throw up.

Then the cramps came, like her worst menstrual pains dialed up to a million, and the world came to a dead halt all around her except for some crazy bastard shouting something about stealing his time.

#

Jack knew he was sick. Dying, maybe.

Well, it *felt* like it, anyway.

Someone *rolled* him last night. Ten years now, living on the street, hell, *owning* the street and the city and the freaking *world, baby!* and some stupid time-dweller managed to find Jack's safest nest and kick the holy crap out of him, taking his newest Goodwill coat and every President stuffed inside it.

He frigging *hurt*. The cold winters never bothered him, the hottest August afternoons didn't faze him, but *this*. Damn it, somebody was going to suffer for this, kid you not, some little

piss-ant could number his days starting *now*, brother, 'cause ol' Jack had plenty of time to find that sorry asshole.

He had all the time in the *world*.

So he'd left his nice, comfortable corner this morning, just as soon as he could muster the strength to move and ignore the pain of his fractured ribs, and gone hunting.

He couldn't make much headway, at first. The constant pain wore him down, and he'd stop every ten minutes or so to hunch down in an alley and cough up thin tendrils of pink drool. *Can't be good, spitting blood like that*, but hey, he doubted his health plan covered it, right?

A little rest, a few breaths that didn't bubble so much, and he'd move on, searching. He'd know who did it. Not a doubt in his mind. He'd *smell* it on the guy, sniff out the taint of his stolen money like a bloodhound.

Moneyhound. Greenbackhound. Poundhound, but wrong country, or guineahound or markhound or damn he hurt and where the hell was he and why was he just standing here with his head against a wall feeling worse and worse and --

*Hellhounds*, that's what they were, ripping him apart from the inside out as the glory moment came on him, and he'd only *thought* he'd hurt before, this was killing him, not like being mugged last night, no way in Hell, this time the thief wanted something *inside* him, and he looked up and saw the woman and felt her *doing* it to him.

"Forget it, bitch! You took my money, but no way you're stealing my *time*!"

He ignored all the pain, ignored the rich folk on the sidewalk frozen in their petty splendor, and leapt at the one woman still moving.

He saw the expression on her face for a split second -- surprise, horror, then *recognition*, somehow -- before he grabbed her throat. Her hand darted into the side pocket of her purse, clutching something shiny and sharp, and drove it into his side as he touched her.

Then his mind exploded with dark energy.

#

Lydia saw the man coming for her, *ohmigod he wants to kill me, he's crazy* and she dug into her purse for the letter opener she'd kept from the office, managed to drag it out without snagging it on the cheap stitching, and brandished it just as she realized why this nut could still be moving *while everyone else lay tangled in her time-web*, and he managed to wrap his hands around her throat right at the moment she stabbed him deep in the side and *ohgodohgodohgodwhatthehellwhatthehellwhat..?*

Then they joined together, a closed loop.

And Time turned inside-out.

3.

Jason always felt nervous in the city. Years of living the suburban life added up to an intrinsic enjoyment of a slow-paced world -- not to mention the fact that whenever his bouts of slip-time occurred he knew his surroundings completely. He'd never wind up somewhere utterly alien, unable to enjoy the experience for fear he might end up somewhere he shouldn't be.

Or wind up in a situation he couldn't get out of, should his do-gooder instincts prove too strong.

Unfortunately, as a well-respected illustrator of children's books, he found it hard to avoid the occasional trip to the nearby Megalopolis to meet a writer/agent/publisher/what-have-you. As he'd done today.

When he left the business lunch, the publisher who'd secured his agreement to illustrate a new, unexpurgated collection of 'Grimm's Fairy Tales' gushed, "We're so happy to have you on this project, Mr. Wesselman! Your work just *speaks* to us -- every painting looks like you've taken

a moment in time and just *frozen* it long enough to get all the details right. Like photo-realism, but *different* somehow. More real than reality.”

Jason had heard the same sentiment, many times. It never failed to amuse him.

He was still smiling about it when the wave of nausea hit him, followed by a series of cramps that threatened to drop him face first into the street.

*Food poisoning?*

Then the city came to a screaming stop in front of him, and he only *wished* for ptomaine.

This was much, much worse.

The world hung in suspension around him, but slip-time never happened this way, not *painfully* — not instantaneously, either. For a moment he felt as if he, too, might grind to a halt, joining the others on the sidewalk around him. He’d never felt that way before. It was as if...

Jason started running before he even gave it conscious thought, weaving through the living statues around him. Too slow, so he finally vaulted over the hood of a yellow cab and took to the center of the street and a relatively unobscured path.

*If I slip back into real-time right now, I’m meat.* The thought knotted his stomach nearly as much as the fleeting cramps had moments before. Still, he kept running, circumnavigating bumpers and an occasional bike messenger.

The thought echoed in his mind. *It’s as if I stepped into someone else’s slip-time.* He’d always wondered if there were others out there who could do what he did, but he’d never seriously considered the idea. He liked believing he was unique.

Now, with his heart pounding and his breath coming in short gasps, he *prayed* he was. If the sickness he’d felt when this started gave any indication at all of way that *other* used slip-time...

*Bad times ahead for everyone.*

He knew this instinctively, just as he knew which direction he should be going, even as the maze of city streets tried to lead him off the path. He zigged and zagged through the inertia-less traffic, cutting across intersections by leaping on hoods and trunks — leaving no dents, not even a footprint — aiming for the unknown epicenter he sensed at nerve-level.

He felt himself slowing down, not sure if the cause was exhaustion or the actual ordeal of fighting to stay out-of-time. He was close to his goal, he knew that much, but he barely had the strength to cross the latest intersection and reach his final destination. He rested, leaning against a classic Rolls Silver Shadow for the moment.

The car shuddered under his weight and sank several inches, the air from its now-rotted tires puffing up clouds of rust.

The ancient Rolls Royce turned from collector’s item to junkyard reliquary in the space of a second, its aged driver still frozen behind the wheel, unaware of the car’s fate.

Jason stared, dumbfounded. *Did I do that?*

Another car, this one a late-model BMW, expired to his left without the benefit of his touch, its shiny factory-fresh paint job now dabs of fading color on a brittle fiberglass corpse. The woman behind the wheel, wizened and uncaring behind flakes of dried makeup, wore a fraying halter top and threadbare jean cutoffs.

As he stared through the yellowed safety glass, her lower jaw sagged, then dropped off into her lap.

*Can’t happen. This can’t happen! She was in time, she was in the freaking loop! She can’t age!*

Another wave of cramps and nausea hit him, this one powerful enough to drive him to his knees. He felt an incredible *pull* at the same time, so undeniable that he started dragging himself forward across the blacktop, scraping his hands and knees in the process.

*Stand up, dammit, now!*

He managed to force himself back to his feet and stumble along the path of least resistance. He maneuvered clumsily around the traffic until he finally reached the curb, almost tripping as he made it to the sidewalk.

*Too many people.* Always the trouble with the city, Jason believed. *Too many bodies, too many chances for stupid mistakes, too many bad things happening around every corner.*

When he finally squeezed his way past several hurried, motionless forms, he found out how bad things could *really* be.

*Something* struggled in the middle of the sidewalk. Something with two heads, each grimacing with pure malignance, and what might be two bodies, though they were locked in such a tight embrace he couldn't tell where one began and the other ended. For a moment he thought that they, too, were frozen in time, until a single drop of blood dripped onto the pavement and splashed into a growing puddle beneath their feet.

Around them, spinning off in eddies Jason could see as shimmering waves resembling heat mirages, Time went wild.

A dreadlocked man wearing a Jimmy Cliff t-shirt aged and crumbled, his dreads littering the sidewalk like dirty grey ropes. A woman pushing a baby carriage sank into her clothing, going from mother to teen to toddler while the infant in the stroller burst through its sides in a sudden growth-spurt. One man, standing in the storm-front between two clashing time-swirls, fluttered from youth to elder and back again so quickly that he looked like a lunatic's composite picture of the Ages of Man.

And the time-wave kept moving outward — Jason felt the disturbance creeping further and further across the city by slow but inexorable increments.

And he had no idea how to stop it.

*I'm no superhero. No guardian angel either, Grandma, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.* For all he knew, this could be the end of the world.

And he could only watch it happen.

*Think. You can't do anything, you can't just kick something and hope it helps, Superjerk, but you can still think!*

He tore his attention away from the effects of Time unfettered and concentrated on the source. Two people, obviously. Male and female, he made out finally, both caught in the other's death grip, both utterly beyond any attempt at contact. Jason saw a thickening haze around them, the center of the time-storm — even as he watched, it grew darker, nearly obliterating the figures trapped at its heart. Energy pulsed from them in feverish waves, and yet it seemed to recycle itself as well, rushing out from them and then being sucked back in.

Like Time tried to escape their grasp, only to be pulled back by their combined gravity.

*Black hole.*

It just popped into his mind and sat there, refusing to go away. Jason never excelled in science, and he could barely remember the whole idea behind the concept of a black hole in the first place. He knew, though, that its gravity was so intense even light could not escape it. It sat there in space, sucking everything in, matter, light, time...

*Time?* He'd read that, right? That, theoretically, even Time itself went all funny near a black hole?

What if these two, in their clash of Timeless wills, had become something like a black hole themselves? Sucking in Time, bending it into crazy shapes, spilling it out only to capture it again?



Jason remembered something else from science class, as well. If there *was* such a thing as a black hole, it needed an outlet somewhere else. A *white hole*, where all of the swallowed energy escaped.

*Oh, no.*

Jason strained to think of something else, a better idea, hell, this one came too quick, it must be wrong, right? *I need to visit Grandma's grave again, I need to do this Grimm's book, I'd like to find a steady girl, if it's not too damned much to ask, I don't need the whole hero biz anymore, it's not me, I live in the suburbs, for God's sake!*

Then he noticed the cracks webbing out across the sidewalk, and the chunks of plaster between the bricks of the nearest brownstone dissolving into fine powder as he watched.

No choice, no choice at all but to run away and hope for the best. Which was, as he knew, just not possible.

*Let me have the strength to last long enough, that's all I ask,* and he took three final steps, one deep breath...

Then he entered the eye of the storm.

One touch:

*Mineminemine/don'ttouchmequeenruler/allmineallminenotYOURSfilthybitch/nastybeggar/mytime/Mytime/ourtimenonononono --*

*JasonI'mJasonnotthemnotthemohgodithurtssomuchtoomuchenergytoomuchtime --*

***OURTIMEOURTIMEOURTIMEYOU CAN'T HAVE IT GET OUT GET OUT --***

*Jason I'm Jason not taking GIVING!*

Jason let it all pass through him, all the greed and pain and hate and trapped Time and he opened his mouth to scream it all out of him, push the poisons away in one great spasm, *gone, gone, let it all be gone, let Time heal all...*

Energy poured through Jason, using him as an open conduit. He thought of his Grandmother and her guardian angels.

Then he surrendered himself to Time.

#

Confusion reigned in the city, or at least in a corridor that extended twenty blocks or so in every direction from the corner of Fourth and Congress. Multi-vehicle pileups occurred where traffic had been flowing fine a second earlier, babies and bodies littered the sidewalks, tripping busy pedestrians who really would have noticed those things under normal circumstances, and once-solid stone edifices groaned with the first warnings of imminent collapse.

It took nearly two hours for the harried, befuddled rescue teams to reach the center of the mess. While they organized a seat-of-the-pants version of triage, Brad Langer, a veteran EMS tech, stumbled across a scene straight out of a Bosch painting: two dead bodies, fused as one, their limbs and organs pretzled together like pipe cleaners with flesh, their mouths open past the tearing point in a mutual grimace of hatred.

Years of front-line medical duty couldn't prepare him for this. He turned to gag, tripping on something that *flinched* under his heel.

Against his better instincts, he looked down to see what he'd stepped on.

A hand, pink as a newborn's, fluttered weakly from under a pile of debris. Brad dug through what looked to be a century's worth of dust and detritus to unearth a young man, naked and hairless, his skin unnaturally smooth, unlined. The man coughed once, croaked something out in a voice far too old for his body.

Brad leaned closer, afraid to move the man in case of any internal injuries, but the man sat up, grabbed Brad by the back of the neck, and asked one question, the demand in his voice too strong to be denied.

“It’s – it’s five thirty-seven,” Brad said. “P.M.”

“That’s a good time to be alive, right?” the man asked.

Then he lay down and, smiling, quietly passed out.

# REVIEWS

*Doctor Who: Valhalla*

*Doctor Who: The Wishing Beast & The Vanity Box*

*Sapphire and Steel: The Mystery of the Missing Hour*

*Judge Dredd - Origins*

All reviews by Lee Harris

Doctor Who: Valhalla

Written by Marc Platt, Directed by John Ainsworth

Starring Sylvester McCoy

Big Finish, £14.99

The Wishing Beast / The Vanity Box

Written by Paul Magrs

Starring Colin Baker, Bonny Langford

Big Finish, £14.99

The first of the *Big Finish Whos* this week sees the seventh Doctor visiting a planet, seemingly with the intention of finding permanent employment. Fans of the series will realise that this isn’t a terribly likely proposition, however, and it soon becomes clear that he is there to prevent a major retail conspiracy.

The entire premise of *Valhalla* (a giant closing down sale for the planet – catalogue stock includes all fixtures, fittings and inhabitants) is a bit daft, but it suits McCoy’s style and he appears to have fun with it. The action is directed with style, and the consistently strong performances are almost enough to distract the listener from what is arguably a fluff piece.

*The Wishing Beast* is curious piece. Colin Baker and Bonny Langford are wonderful (and I never thought I’d be writing that sentence). Unfortunately, the rest of the cast seem to think they are in a pantomime – performances are over-the-top and unbelievable. The Doctor and Mel land on an asteroid inhabited by two lonely old women, who seemingly just want some company for a chat over a nice cup of tea. Their real motive is revealed quite late in the story, but the plot is so predictable that the episode frequently plays catch-up with your own imagination. Thankfully, *The Wishing Beast* is just a three-parter, supported by a single-episode comedic story, *The Vanity Box*, which is almost worth the cost of purchase on its own.

Comedy *Who* rarely works. It takes a peculiar talent to make the *Who* universe both amusing while still retaining everything that we love about the franchise. In this instance, Magrs has chosen to set his tale in 1960s Salford. Regional accents abound, with folk gadding about, acting no better than they should, using fancy gadgets that aren’t for the likes of us. Eeeeeee. Special mention has to go to Toby Longworth. His Monsieur Coiffure (owner of the titular beauty salon) is a genius creation – his false French accent frequently slips into his native broad Lancastrian, but



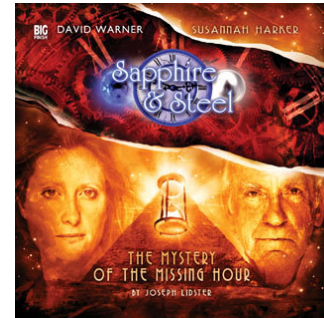
the ladies of Salford don't mind, as long as they get their extreme makeover. But how will The Doctor infiltrate this lion's den (or "poodle parlour" as one of the locals describes it) - after all, The Vanity Box only caters to ladies? Enter the sixth Doctor in full Ena Sharples mode, the comedy old-lady accent reminiscent of Les Dawson and Roy Barraclough at their garden fence best. If only all comedy *Who* was this good!

**Sapphire and Steel: The Mystery of the Missing Hour**  
Written by Joseph Lidster, Directed by Nigel Fairs  
Starring David Warner, Susannah Harker, Colin Baker, Sarah Douglas

*S&S:TMOTMH* could not work in any other medium. Lidster has created a three-quarters perfect piece of audio drama.

When a murder takes place in The Cairo Hilton (Egypt, land of the Pharaohs), it is not long before our intrepid sleuths are on the case. Yes, Shuffle and Sixpence (the best, and most celebrated amateur detectives in all of London) are confident that they'll solve the mystery before it's time for a bottle of celebratory champagne. Why, though, do Shuffle and Sixpence sound so much like Sapphire and Steel? Why does everyone keep mentioning where they are? Why is the maid's incredibly dodgy Irish accent never questioned? To be sure, so it is. And where, oh where, are Sapphire and Steel?

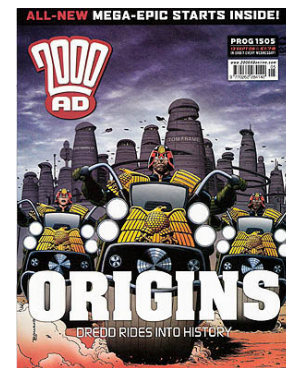
The first three quarters of the story are great fun, and the mystery is almost resolved by the end of the third episode. The final part, however is almost completely redundant, and would have been almost acceptable, if it were not for one particularly dreadful performance. As a three-parter, *The Mystery of the Missing Hour* could have been brilliant. With the inclusion of part four, it's merely very good.



**Judge Dredd – Origins**  
Written by John Wagner  
Artwork by Carlos Ezquerra  
Published by Rebellion. RRP: £12.99

Twenty-five years after the beginning of the Dredd legend, John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra return to tell his origin story, at last! The artwork is as detailed and evocative as we have come to expect from Ezquerra, and *Wagner's script* is note-perfect. Told in flashback by Dredd himself, and beginning before his "birth", following him briefly through the Judges' Academy, this is the quintessential Dredd story, as told by the great man himself. His final act, though completely in character, still comes as a shock, and the reader is left wondering how things might have turned out if Dredd had changed one simple decision.

If you have ever had a yearning to discover Dredd's roots, you cannot afford to miss this volume.



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**Coming Next Week:** Fiction: Every Odalisque Knows by Dominae Petrosini

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