

# Hub

Issue 49  
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Editors: Lee Harris, Alasdair Stuart and Trudi Topham.  
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## An Interview with Hub

SF Writer and regular blogger, Gareth D. Jones asked if Lee would be happy to answer a few questions for part of Gareth's regular "Interviews with Editors" series. You can read the interview over at:  
<http://garethdjones.blogspot.com/2008/03/editors-lee-harris.html>

## Alt.Fiction

April 26<sup>th</sup> sees the 3<sup>rd</sup> alt.fiction event in Derby. It's a great one-day literary genre event, attended by some of the very best writers the genre has to offer! There are discussion groups, readings, panels and much merriment (there's a bar, too!). *Hub* editor, Lee Harris, is appearing on one of the panels – "Writers and The Internet" – alongside well-known online lumaries Darren Turpin (The Artist Formerly Known As Ariel) and writer extraordinaire, Simon Spurrier. The event grows in popularity every year, so be sure to get your ticket early! More details at:  
<http://www.derby.gov.uk/LeisureCulture/ArtsEntertainment/Alt.Fiction.htm>

## Advertise with Hub

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## Next Week

As well as being issue 50 (*fifty!*), due to a couple of weeks' breather we had, recently, next week's issue also happens to be our **One Year Anniversary Issue** as an electronic magazine! A bumper issue, and sure to be a collectors' piece in years to come, so keep that PDF safe for when Antiques Roadshow comes to town...  
☺

## About Hub

Every week we publish a piece of short fiction, along with at least one review and sometimes a feature or interview. If you like what you read here, please consider making a donation over at [www.hub-mag.co.uk](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk). We pay our writers, and anything you donate helps us to continue to attract high quality fiction and non-fiction.



by Sarah Vickers

Robert picked his way between pizza boxes and half finished cups of coffee, towards the computer in the corner of the bedroom. Cobwebs clung to the curtains. The bed was unmade; the duvet sprawled on the floor. But the computer shone with cleanliness. It sat on a dust free black desk, a small refrigerator stocked with cans of cola next to

it. A coaster was the only object marring the pristine surface. Robert slid into the black leather chair and clicked the mouse. The screen flickered into life and his world sat before him. Avalon.

He made some quick checks. He had barely been away from the screen for an hour, but there were already twenty messages for Xavier. His character: the knight in shining armour who protected all of Avalon, the honoured and honourable Xavier. Now Robert had a half day, he could go and rescue the Princess Adriana. Well, that was her character name. He had never managed to start a conversation with her outside the game. He had always intended to, always hoped to but never quite managed.

Flicking through his messages he saw one from William and sighed. He seemed nice, but he really had no idea how to play.

*Xavier,*

*Need help. Stuck in castle dungeons. No Gold. No Princess. No way out. Sorry.*

*William.*

Robert looked over Xavier's equipment list once more and settled into his character. He had to rescue William, he was a Knight. All the same, he couldn't help wishing that it was the Princess he was rescuing.

Xavier galloped off toward the black castle. He knew a horrible death might await him, the evil Mage who ruled would kill him given the chance. A message flashed on the screen: *Random Encounter.*

It looked like he wasn't going to be able to do anything today, despite all the unexpected spare time. The screen changed and displayed an old crone in the middle of the road. Couldn't they think of anything more original? If she had apples he'd be mad. Xavier climbed down from the horse and Robert started typing.

"Good day to you, my lady."

"Good day, young Knight. I seek passage through the forest."

"Indeed lady? I would be happy to assist." Damn. The forest was well out of his way, but he was honourable, it was on his character sheet. If he didn't help those who asked he lost points.

"You are too kind, my lord. I have no way to pay you."

"Money is of no consequence to me, my lady. To know that you are safe is enough." And no gold for all this effort. Never mind, thought Robert. He liked being able to help people. The world was so much simpler here. Sometimes inconvenient, and occasionally he had to go in the opposite direction, but his sheet kept him on the straight and narrow. Xavier helped the old lady onto the horse and set them walking through the forest while he went to make a coffee. It would take at least half an hour to cross and the computer would let him know if there were any more encounters.

He wondered about Princess Adriana. He still wasn't sure if she was a real person or if she had been generated by the server for plot. He liked her either way. She was nice to rescue and usually came with a prize. Last time he rescued her he had so much gold he'd been able to auction it on e-bay for real money.

The computer beeped. Another random encounter? Seemed strange. Robert went back to the screen. It was a message from William. The idiot, he must be using all his magic points to get these messages out. He opened it:

*Escaped castle. Princess Adriana Safe. Want to talk to you in real life. Send e-mail?*

Robert blew on his coffee. Well, he might be a nice guy. There could be no harm in sending him a message.

*Sure: SirXavier@hotmail.com*

It only took five minutes for the first message to arrive.

*Hi,*

*I play William in the Avalon game. Is this the player of Xavier?*

*Jenny.*

Jenny? William was being played by a girl? Wow a girl playing the game. Well it wasn't the Princess, but Adriana might not be real anyway. Robert wondered what to do now.

*Dear Jenny,*

*Player of Xavier here. Didn't realise you were a girl. What happened to the Princess?*

*Robert.*

*Robert,*

*Adriana rescued herself. Then William. Sorry, she got loads of points for it. Does it matter that I'm a girl?*

*Jenny.*

So, the Princess was played by someone. Only proper characters could rescue one another. Xavier had almost crossed the forest.

*Dear Jenny*

*Doesn't matter that you're a girl. Need to get back to game. Mail more later.*

*Robert*

Xavier rode into the village. The Duke here owed him a favour anyway. He took the old woman to the manor house.

"My lord Duke, this lady has travelled a long way and is in need of hospitality. Please help her; I have a mission to complete."

He was surprised when the old lady spoke.

"What is your mission, Knight?"

Robert paused. His mission had been completed by the Princess. Then he had an idea. No female character in this game would turn down Xavier. He was going to find the Princess and ask her to marry him.

"I seek Princess Adriana."

"Then you will find her."

The screen went purple, then blue. Magic use. Robert waited for the screen to clear. He was in a banquet hall, there was a dance. It was packed solid. Xavier scanned the dance floor. Princess Adriana was there, dancing with William. He couldn't even win here.

## About the Author

After graduating with an MA from the University of Dundee, Sarah Vickers moved from the United Kingdom to St Louis for a change of lifestyle and a definite change of pace. She is a member of WUTA, the friendliest group of writers she has ever met. Sarah is married to a scientist who is good enough to support her in her eccentricities. Their lives cross most when they are both submitting to publishers. She has been published in *Wanderings*, *The Blotter Rag*, *Kinships Magazine* and *Chick Flicks* e-zine.

If you enjoyed this week's tale, and the non-fiction that follows, please make a donation at [www.hub-mag.co.uk](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk).

Your donations help us to pay our writers and to continue to bring you your weekly dash of *Hub*.

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## REVIEWS

*Jericho - Season One* and *The Grin of the Dark* reviewed by Marie O'Regan  
*Doctor Who s4, Ep1: Partners in Crime* reviewed by Alasdair Stuart

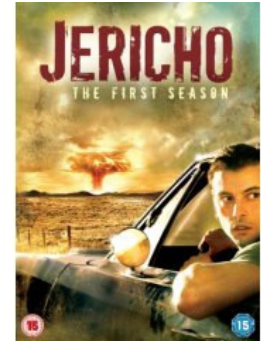
### **Jericho – Season One** (Region 2)

Starring: Skeet Ulrich, Ashley Scott, Gerald McRaney, Pamela Reed.

Paramount Home Entertainment (UK). £39.99

Out Now

**Jericho** was something of a surprise when it was first unleashed on the public. A series set in the eponymous small town in a post-apocalyptic USA (twenty three bombs have gone off across the States, decimating civilisation), the series grips the viewer from the first episode – and it doesn't let go.



Starring Skeet Ulrich (**Scream**) as Jake Green, a prodigal son returned from who knows where and finding himself in the middle of helping Jericho survive; and Lennie James (**Snatch, Lost In Space**) as Richard Hawkins, a mysterious stranger who seems to know more than he is letting on and has very handy skills; the show is reminiscent of aspects of **The Stand, Lost**...any number of shows where survivors of something traumatic struggle to do just that. The very first episode deals with the attacks and their immediate aftermath; and we spend the rest of the season watching as Jericho pulls together, for the most part, revealing more about its characters and its past as it goes along, chronicling the town's battles with fallout, looters...and its own secrets.

Sadly, the series didn't attract enough viewers on its first airing to keep it afloat, and it was cancelled. That wasn't the end of it, though. The audience it did attract was loyal – and voluble – enough to mount an aggressive campaign to bring the show back, sending emails, letters, and peanuts by the ton to the studios in an attempt to make their voices heard. At time of writing, they've succeeded, and a second series has now been commissioned.

The Season One boxed set contains all twenty two episodes of the first season, although the extras seem only to consist of optional commentaries to some episodes.

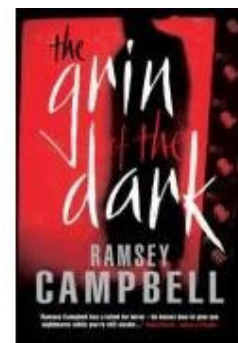
### ***The Grin of the Dark***

Ramsey Campbell.

Virgin Books (1st May)

Paperback £7.99

*The Grin of the Dark* tells the story of failed journalist Simon Lester as he attempts to get his life back on track. With his career in a downhill spiral that started with the demise of a controversial magazine he wrote for, Lester is desperate for a new start. When he runs into his old film tutor, now an editor for a university press, opportunity appears to be knocking.



Lester is commissioned to write a book on the career of an obscure comedian from the early part of the twentieth century, Tubby Thackeray. Thackeray seems to have faded into obscurity under something

of a cloud, and from the strange things that start happening when Lester begins his research, someone wants to make sure he stays forgotten. The banter between Lester and a cyberstalker, Smilemime, is blackly amusing and worryingly familiar to anyone that spends much time online.

The story becomes a tale of Simon's search for the truth even as reality starts to fray at the edges, and Simon himself becomes ever more unstable.

As usual, Campbell manages to convey an escalating mood of unease with his description of things almost seen, but never revealed. Lester's slow disintegration even as things start to look up in his personal life is well handled, and the reader is never quite sure of what is or isn't real.

Treading similar territory to novels such as *Secret Stories*, *The Grin of the Dark* is an extremely enjoyable, whilst deeply unsettling, read. Campbell remains a must-read.

## **Doctor Who - Series 4, Episode 1: Partners in Crime**

Written by Russell T Davies

Directed by James Strong

**Starring:** David Tennant, Catherine Tate, Sarah Lancashire, Bernard Cribbins and Jacqueline King

Spring is in the air, the BBC are recruiting for Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber and *Doctor Who* is once again on our screens. But this time, of course, there's a cloud over the show. There's always a cloud over *Doctor Who*, because, fundamentally, there are some *Doctor Who* fans who love to complain about things, especially things that they have no control over.

Enter Catherine Tate, stage left, pursued by a mob.

The good news is: she doesn't need to be. Tate is a total asset to the show, and her performance here, to say nothing of the much-maligned character of Donna, appears to be the cornerstone of something genuinely very different.

The episode itself is a farce, but not in the pejorative sense. The Doctor and Donna are both investigating Adipose, a mysterious diet pill being marketed by Miss Foster (Lancashire). In theory, it works beautifully but in practice, something extremely odd is going on and Adipose's slogan 'The fat just walks away' may be a bit too literal...

James Strong's light, breezy direction makes this shine and the first fifteen minutes or so are huge fun, Donna and The Doctor bouncing around the same locations at the same time but somehow never meeting. The moment where they finally do is nothing short of glorious, a pitch perfect parody of the operatic 'I'll Save You' moment from last year's '42' that effectively sets out the store for this series: it's fun, it's funny and it's lighter than it's been in a while.

Davies' scripts are regularly pilloried but this is one of his best, and the comedy is balanced with moments of casual, offhand darkness and some beautifully played character beats. Donna's loving, gentle relationship with her grandad (The magnificent Cribbins) is neatly contrasted with her acerbic mother (King), still embittered by the events of 'The Runaway Bride'. Likewise, the Doctor speaking to an empty TARDIS and his offhand admission that he ruined Martha's life show the characters are on parallel paths in life as well as in their investigations. Neither are quite complete, both need something to fill their lives and both find that, or something like it, in each other. Plus, the fact that the Doctor delivers, effectively to camera, a speech about how this is going to be a very different relationship to the unrequited love Martha had for him will, I suspect, cause sighs of relief across the land.

With a typically excellent performance from Tennant at its centre, the only real problem the episode has is that it's a bit slight. The central concept is interesting but slight and seems put in place more to facilitate the Doctor/Donna relationship than anything else.

That being said, this is easily the best opening episode since 'Rose' and is genuinely, and consistently, fun. This feels like a different kind of season and if every script is this quality then this looks set to be one of the strongest series yet. **Recommended.**

If you have enjoyed this week's issue, please consider making a small donation at [www.hub-mag.co.uk](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk). We pay our writers, and your support is appreciated.