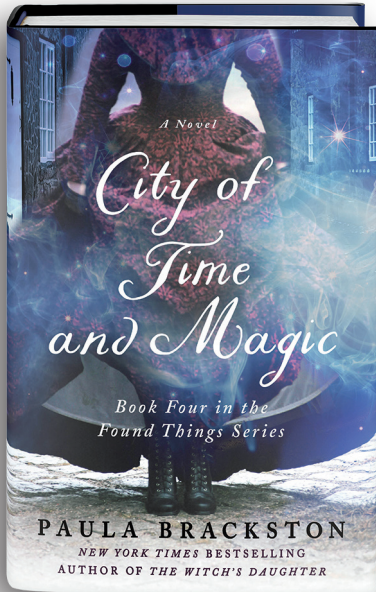


# City of Time and Magic

## READING GUIDE



### About the Book

In Book Four of the Found Things series, Xanthe's mission is, above all else, to find and save Liam. The stakes could not be higher for her, as she feels responsible for his disappearance, and knows that no one else can rescue him.

This adventure takes her to the second half of the nineteenth century, to the sprawling, seething city of London. I have a lot of favorite eras, but the Victorian period has to be the best of the best for me. I think it's because it is so embedded in our cultural consciousness. As soon as I start to think about, say, the mid 1880s, at a particular time of year, in a particular town, I can see everything clearly. And that makes it great fun to write! I so enjoy getting the details correct. Authenticity is a constant challenge when writing historical fantasy; the facts must be spot-on, but must not obstruct the magical elements of the story. It's a balance I've found thrilling to play with throughout the whole series.

Due to the pandemic, I wasn't able to make trips to London to research the setting for the book, which would have been lovely. Fortunately, I lived in the center of the city for seven years, so I am pretty familiar with it. That life seems a hundred years ago to me, and a long way from the family and country existence I live now. When I lived there I was a lowly teacher of English as a foreign language—a job I enjoyed, but that didn't pay particularly well. One of the ways I saved money was by walking everywhere instead of taking buses or tubes. This meant I slowly learned routes all over the city, making connections between places and becoming familiar with shortcuts and parks and fascinating little streets and buildings I might otherwise have missed. This time was well spent, as it turned out, because now I have only to close my eyes to conjure up those hidden houses, grand avenues, and atmospheric streets once again.

So, London, 1887. Why so specific? Well, one of the reasons was for the women's fashions. Having just come from the Regency elegance of *The Garden of Promises and Lies*, I could not face describing those overwhelming, comical crinolines that plagued quite a number of years during Victoria's reign. Instead I went for what was called the "Natural Form." We can argue about how a fat and flouncy bustle is natural, but the overall shape and sexy silhouette is so much better than those enormous hoops!



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The second reason for my choice of date is more complex. It has to do with the fact that *City of Time and Magic*, while being first and foremost the continuation of Xanthe's story, is also a



crossover book with *The Witch's Daughter* and *The Return of the Witch*. In fact, if you haven't read those two books, I highly recommend doing so before diving into *City of Time and Magic*! You can read them out of sequence and this one will, of course, still make perfect sense. I just think you will get more out of the story if you've read the others. For me, a very testing part of the process was making sure this book worked as a continuation of the story of Elizabeth and Erasmus. And, as she is a near immortal and he is a Time Stepper, they came with their own complications.

This was my first attempt at bringing together two different series in one book. There were times while I was writing when I seriously questioned the wisdom of doing it, and could be heard asking the dogs: "Whose idea was this?" more than once.

There were so many plates to keep spinning. I had to continue the *Found Things* story, reintroduce characters from the witch books (keeping in mind some readers won't have met them before), give everybody enough time onstage, as it were, and propel the story forward in a satisfying, exciting, and plausible way. No easy task, with a bigger cast and more complicated story than any of the earlier books. I think I've succeeded. I hope you feel so too. I certainly had a blast spending time with so many of the characters who have become my friends. I know I'm not the only writer who develops lasting and important relationships with her characters. I have

missed Elizabeth and Erasmus (I wrote *The Return of the Witch* in 2016) so it has been a joy to write about them again.

One of the things I've found interesting about writing a continuing series which contains complete stories as well as ongoing ones is the way it allows me as a writer, and you lovely readers, to develop our relationships with the characters. It's felt more like a TV series in some ways. And each time I sit down to start another adventure with Xanthe and Flora and Liam and Harley I hear the clang of the old brass bell as we step

into the shop. I can smell the beeswax polish, leather, and wood of the antiques. I can taste Gerri's perfect lemon drizzle cake. It is so wonderfully familiar now. And the excitement for me is to create new stories within that friendly, familiar place, among those people we are coming to know better and better.

I hope you enjoy your little bit of spinning and that you find Victorian London as fascinating as I always do. I imagine I am time travelling not just with my characters, but with my readers as well. Wherever will we go next, I wonder?



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## Discussion Questions

1. In *City of Time and Magic* I have used two viewpoints, so that we get to see where Liam is and what he is doing. What did you think of this decision? Did you notice it? Did it make you feel distanced from Xanthe, or did you enjoy being closer to Liam for some of the time?
2. Xanthe found that she began to feel at home in Victorian London. She felt it was a good fit for her, and *somewhen* she could actually live. How do you think you would fare in such a city in the late 1800s?
3. Elizabeth was not the star of this book, but she did play a very important role. How did you feel about Xanthe meeting a real witch? They are both formidable, extraordinary women—which one did you identify with more, and why?
4. Harley finally gets to Spin! What did you think of him as a Victorian gentleman? Do you think, in his position, you would have told Annie the truth?
5. Erasmus is a force of nature, always restless and on the move. If you could have him work his Time Stepping magic for you, where and when would you have him take you?
6. There are two significant deaths in this book. What was your reaction to them? It's hard to kill off a beloved character, but sometimes the story demands it. How did you feel about losing them?
7. Have you ever visited London? If you have, did you recognize the place as it is described here? Of course London is a very modern city in many ways, but because so much of the old areas still survive it is like walking through history every time you turn a corner. If you were to visit London now, which historic sites or buildings would you like to see?
8. Liam has to learn to box and to dance in this story! How would the men in your life manage either of those things? Would you enjoy dancing at a Victorian ball, or does the idea fill you with dread?
9. How would you describe your perfect Victorian outfit? Would it be a smart day suit or dress like Xanthe's? Or a silk ball gown? Or something Gothic and grand?
10. Now that Xanthe has a team, she is even better equipped to continue her work as a Spinner. Where would you like to see her go next?

I love hearing from my readers! You can keep up with all my book news and general stuff on my Facebook page, my YouTube channel, and my website and contact me there. Happy Reading!



Paula Brackston



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