

Chapter One: Kindling

Looking back, the signs were all there to see, as they always are when the road takes an unexpected detour. But that's the trouble with hindsight, it lingers on some things more than others and lets us pick and choose the reasons for being where we are. We all know that change is constant in life, but most of the time it doesn't feel that way. We get into a comfortable routine and just idle along. Things might not be perfect, but they are okay, and that's fine. In times gone by, people thought this was because the world was made up of four elements, each keeping the other in balance, and as long as it remained so, things would continue as they were. A fifth element, however, was also posited: the provenance of the gods, which acted as a catalyst for change. It could take any form, and when it appeared, nothing would ever be the same again.

For the eclectic group of workers at the Whitely's canning plant in Boughton Chapel, Kent, it arrived one day in spring. It was a typical day like any other for that time of year, cool in the morning with a misty, yellow haze that promised a warm and sunny day ahead, but as usual, the forecast was for rain. The factory was running only one shift and would continue to do so until late in the summer when the apple crop came in, so only the regular staff was working. During the height of the season there would be two more lines running, and a throng of seasonal workers would fill the factory with a hubbub of noise and activity, but for now, they were canning the last of the old crop, and the work was relaxed and cruisy.

Whitely's was a family business, one of many established back in the eighties when it had suddenly become fashionable to eat organic foods. They had started out on a shoestring budget with the intention of producing the best canned fruit possible, but all the equipment was second-hand, and ergonomics was not a priority. For the workers on the line, conditions were uncomfortable, especially in winter. In recent years, however, new regulations had come into force and management had modernised the production lines. It had cost a lot of money, and the company had struggled to stay competitive with the newer factories. Old Whitely himself had retired two years ago and had put a manager in charge, a

man who had overseen the upgrading of the factory with an accountant's eye for efficiency. He had managed to save the business. Working conditions were better, but the company had lost something intangible in the process.

James Butler certainly thought so as he stood at his workstation packing cans into boxes. He looked up at the clock and saw that it was almost ten o'clock. Hurray! Five minutes until smoko, then only another seven hours to go. A resigned grimace flickered around his lips as the second hand ticked by with agonising slowness, matching his movements as he packaged the cans. Over the years he had developed a rhythm, swaying from one foot to the other and rocking back onto his heels then up onto his toes to stretch out his calves, but his feet still became sore. The workers were supposed to do exercises every hour or so, but nobody ever did. Who could be arsed doing that? He had witnessed the changes in the factory at first hand, and while he appreciated the improvements, he missed the old days. Back then, starting on the line straight out of school, somehow it was okay. You could call it nostalgia, but old Whitely really did seem to care about what he was making. He had a passion for what he was doing, and it wasn't just about the money. Before, when Mr Whitely came to work in the morning, he looked genuinely happy to be here and you got the impression that he gave a shit. Mr Whitely had what used to be called the common touch. Every day he came out of his office and walked around the line. He knew everyone's name, and you could talk to him. Even though he was the boss, he was still one of the team. Most importantly, he took an interest in his workers so that they felt included and valued.

The new guy was all 'health and safety' and efficiency. He ticked all the right boxes, but only spoke to the foremen and rarely came onto the floor, unlike the old man who would sometimes roll up his sleeves and join in on the line. All day the manager sat in his warm office in a suit and tie. Through the frosted window, James could see him just sitting there. *What the hell did he do?* James wondered. His name was Richard Ivor, but everybody had to call him Mr Ivor. They did, to his face, but among themselves he was always Dick.

James raised his eyes to the clock again, willing it to be ten o'clock. It wasn't. God, he was bored. He opened his eyes as wide as he could and stretched out his face, then he rubbed it vigorously to get his circulation going. *Just another day in purgatory*, he thought. The line clanked on endlessly, can after can. Looking down the conveyer, he noticed old

Grimes, the line foreman, staring pedantically at the tins going by. “Oh great! That’s all I need, bloody Grimes turning up to peer over my shoulder,” he muttered under his breath.

Grimes was a skinny guy, slightly stooped with age, but with that stiff urgency and punctilious way about him that James considered typical of the man’s generation. His thinning grey hair was combed over his bald patch and slicked down with oily hair cream. A small, wiry moustache crawled across his top lip. Frugal and conscientious to a fault, Grimes had grown up in the bleak austerity of post-war Britain. His was the unfortunate demographic saddled with the hopes and expectations of those wartime parents who desperately wanted to believe that their suffering and self-sacrifice had been worthwhile. Their children knew they would never live up to either. Instead, they would always reside inadequately in the shadow of the ‘greatest generation’.

The line foreman took a pencil from behind his ear and wrote something on his clipboard before moving slowly and meticulously along. Behind him, James saw his best friend, Marcus, watching the cans. He was a quality controller whose job it was to make sure that the cans were in good condition. It required concentration, but like all the line work, it was deathly boring, and the two young guys always did their best to keep each other’s spirits up. James caught Marcus’s eye over Grimes’s shoulder, and he grinned as his friend cheerfully raised his middle finger to him.

The hooter sounded and the line clanked to a halt. James stretched again and headed for the canteen, joining the melee at the door. Marcus arrived a moment later and together they made their way over to the counter where the teapot sat, resting as always on its scorched cork mat, swaddled in a brightly coloured tea cosy. A tall, swan-neck spout projected from the front, and a curly handle embossed with cast-iron animal figures looped over the top. Two handle-grips made of hard, black rubber protected their hands from the heat, and like almost everything in the factory, the teapot was ancient and worn smooth from years of use.

The new manager, eager to show that he was ‘with it’ and had the workers’ welfare at the top of his priority list, had installed a modern coffee machine. It was quite popular with some of the younger staff, but the ground coffee in it was crap, and they both preferred the tea.

In the background, the radio was playing classic hits from the nineties. Most of the factory hands were middle-aged, so the radio was always set to the same station and the

young guys accepted it with good humour—at least it didn't play hip-hop! James recognised the melancholy, gravelly voice of Bruce Springsteen singing 'The Ghost of Tom Joad'. He listened to the lyrics for a moment and screwed up his face. *Whatever happened to turn Springsteen into such a miserable old git?* he wondered.

They went over to their usual table and sat down. Winston was already there, his fingers wrapped around a large mug. Everyone called him Winnie. The two guys looked over and greeted him: "Hi Winnie."

James noticed Winnie's mug was filled with a bean soup that looked like orange puke. It smelled nice though. Winnie was about forty-five and taller than James. Originally from Kingston, he still retained his distinctive Jamaican accent even though he had been living in the UK for decades. He had an athletic build, but these days he was carrying a few extra kilos around the middle, and he looked tired and worn out. A dark beard, its ends tinged with grey, engulfed his face. His hair was braided into dreadlocks that were normally tied in a bundle or wrapped up in a scarf. Today, though, he was wearing a green woolly hat with a hole cut in the top, and his dreads sprouted out of it like a pot plant. He wore military-style trousers in green and brown camouflage colours, and over his torso stretched a thick, woollen pullover in bright yellow with black stripes. A pair of dark, soulful eyes gazed wearily from under heavy lids. What you could see of his face was lined, rough and dimpled like the skin of a ripe avocado. He smiled broadly in a friendly greeting, revealing uneven gaps between teeth stained with nicotine.

A few minutes later Joe arrived. James figured he was in his fifties, but he looked older. His belly started halfway down his chest and bulged over his trousers, straining the braces that held them up. He wore brown corduroy trousers and a chequered woollen shirt with a red puffer jacket over the top, unzipped to the waist. A fur-lined hat was pulled down over his ears. It had curly flaps that stuck out to the sides and waggled up and down as he walked. He nodded in greeting and sat down opposite Winnie.

"Sup, mon?" mumbled Winnie.

"Same shit," replied Joe. "You?"

"Same shit, brudder."

They nodded knowingly and started eating. James and Marcus looked at each other and smiled. They had seen this scene play out many times before. When they started working at Whitely's, both guys had been told that if they stayed for ten years, they would

automatically become foremen. It was company policy, intended to recognise and reward long service with a pay rise and some responsibility. That was typical of old Whitely; he realised that there was no career path at the factory, but he was a decent old bloke and he wanted to do right by the workers. Unfortunately, nobody with any skills or ambition stayed that long, so in practice, all the foremen were morons. The guys were determined that it would not happen to them, yet they had both been there for nearly four years already. It was a depressing thought, but the work was easy and there was not much else around, so the years just went by.

“What’s happening, dude?” asked James.

“Not much. You remember that chick Linda?” Marcus asked, raising an eyebrow in happy contemplation.

James nodded. “Yeah! Cutie with dark hair.”

“I asked her out Friday.” Marcus leaned back and put his hands behind his head.

“Did she say yes?” James asked, his face not quite hiding his annoyance.

Marcus was smug. “She’s getting back to me.”

“Do you think she likes you?” James continued, trying hard to sound like he didn’t care.

“She will after I weave my magic.” Marcus pouted and leaned forward wiggling his fingers as though weaving fabric in the air.

James looked at Marcus. He was tall, dark haired and handsome in that soft sort of way that chicks seemed to like. He could pull off that smouldering, brooding look while managing not to seem like an arsehole. A pang of jealousy ran through him. Even though Marcus was his best friend, there was nothing he wanted to imagine less than him weaving his magic over Linda.

“You’re so full of crap, man,” he said, grinning.

“Wait and see,” said Marcus with a smug smile. “Wait and see.”

Bastard! James wrinkled his nose as though there was a bad smell.

“How’s your day going?” Marcus asked after a moment, changing the subject.

James was pleased to talk about something else. “I’m bored out of my head. What about you?”

“It was fine until old Grimy started giving me shit.” Marcus pulled a face. “He spotted a mark on a can.”

“He has to find something, otherwise little Dickie thinks he’s not doing his job,” James commiserated.

“Yeah. Well, it’s the third time this week and it’s pissing me off.” Marcus put his hands behind his head again and linked his fingers, stretching his shoulders. Then he smiled thoughtfully and said, “Personally though, I don’t think he’s been working out enough recently.”

“What do you mean?” James raised an eyebrow questioningly.

“Well, he looks like he could do with some exercise. You know, use his muscles a bit.” Marcus held out his arms and flexed his biceps, grinning from ear to ear. Then he did a slow swing like a softball player. “Boom!” he intoned.

“You don’t mean ...!” James exclaimed.

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I mean.” Marcus smiled with an air of determined satisfaction.

“Dude, you can’t,” James whispered theatrically.

Marcus spoke quietly so that the other men could not hear him. “Oh yes, I can! Just watch old Grimy’s face.”

James knew what he meant. Just past Marcus’s workstation was the can sealer, an old machine that had been bought cheap when Whitely had set up the factory. It did its job efficiently enough, but it was highly temperamental. Any deformity on a tin caused it to jam, which was why somebody had to watch all the cans go by. When the line stopped, a can would sometimes fall over or get slightly off-centre, and when the line started up again, the can would buckle on the conveyer or go in sideways. It was always the first one on the belt of course, right next to the sealer, so you had to be really quick to grab it before it went through. It was a mistake that anybody could make, and you couldn’t really be held responsible for it. All it needed was a little dent in the can.

James had seen it all before, and he knew what would happen if Marcus put a deformed can into the machine. It would get stuck. Then there would be a horrendous clanking and the sealer would start spitting cans out in all directions, spraying fruit juice everywhere. Of course, the foremen would hit the emergency stop button, but chaos would ensue, and they would all come flying out of their office with crowbars and start belting the hell out of the machine to unjam it. It had been rather alarming the first time he saw these

clowns covered in juice and pulp, sliding about like Keystone cops, but James had a feeling it would be hilarious the second time round.

And so it was.

It took until nearly midday to clean up the mess and restart production, and Marcus was right, old Grimes was apoplectic. He went so red in the face and neck that James thought he might actually explode. It took all his self-control to maintain his composure and not give the game away. The rest of the day went by pretty fast after that. All he had to do to bring about an almost therapeutic level of Luddite satisfaction, was visualise the gum-chewing line guys standing around looking perplexed as the sealer got pounded into submission. None of them would ever forget it. *Good old Marcus*, he thought. It was impossible to be pissed off with him for long.

Unfortunately, it was also the day they learned that they would not be working the new harvest season. Little Dickie announced at the end of the shift that the factory would be closing temporarily for upgrading and would reopen with fully automated production lines. Only a handful of staff would be retained, mainly to look after the machinery and the robots. All the manual jobs would go. He told them he regretted that market pressure had forced the company to restructure, and management would do everything they could to help the workers find new employment. They would receive what he called ‘a generous severance package’, and an employment consultant would be available to help them transition to the workforce.

Until that point, neither James nor Marcus had given any serious thought to the future. It came as a shock, and they had absolutely no idea what they would do next.

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Two days later, along with everyone else, James went to the motivational session run by the employment consultant. He was getting paid for it, so he figured it was the least he could do. But as he sat in the overly warm meeting room, listening to the crisp PowerPoint presentation, he could feel his frustration rising. He scratched his head and shuffled uncomfortably in his seat. The immaculately dressed young woman from the employment agency noticed the expression on his face and smiled. She walked over and stood helpfully by his side.

“What’s the trouble?” she enquired.

"I don't get it." James stared up at the motivational coach, his expression as blank as the page in front of him. Everyone else was dutifully scribbling, although he suspected a good half of them were probably just doodling.

"The idea," she sighed, and not for the first time that morning, "is to get you to think outside the box when it comes to choosing a new career to pursue. Focus in on your interests and talents to find work that you will enjoy."

"But I don't have any talents." He pushed himself back in the chair, folded his arms, and continued to stare. She was a pretty woman, and to give credit where credit's due, she was trying her best to be helpful. But he really didn't see how any of this was going to result in an enjoyable and fulfilling career for him. If she thought that her trendy buzz words and formulaic CV writing was going to get him onto any path that didn't involve burger flipping or shelf stacking, she was delusional. He could see the road ahead: it was strewn with dead-end jobs and unemployment lines, and he was pissed off because there didn't seem to be any way out. James saw himself as a fairly laid-back guy, and he didn't mean to be an asshole, but over the past few days, reality had set in hard, and it was all just too depressing to think about.

The motivational coach wasn't convinced. "Come on now. Don't sell yourself short. Everyone has interests. What are *you* interested in?" She emphasised the word 'you' to try to engage him, and she noticed that most of the room was now listening to their exchange. *Good, she thought, keep it calm and cool like the manual said. Now it was time to win them over, be professional.* In every group there was always one that pushed your buttons, the manual warned, and James had been pushing hers all morning.

She read his name tag and smiled pleasantly. "There's got to be something, James. You're a smart guy!" Her face was a study in enthusiasm and conviction.

He decided it was time to hit her with his money shot. "Well, I'm interested in blackjack and hookers, but I don't see how I'm going to get a job that combines the two."

The room exploded.

To her credit, the coach just sighed, her deepest yet, adjusted her hair, and waited for the snorting and giggling to stop. "Look, your company didn't have to provide this session for you, and it's free. I suggest you take advantage of that and get whatever you can out of it."

"Cryptids," he said petulantly. "I like watching shows about cryptids."

“Cryptids? Sorry, I’m not familiar with the term. Would you explain, please?” She hoped this was him finally getting on track, but the stifled laughter erupting from some of the men caused her to doubt his sincerity.

“Animals whose existence is disputed or unsubstantiated, like Sasquatch or Bigfoot, the Chupacabra, and alien big cats.” He maintained his petulance, but all she heard was cats and animals.

“So you’re interested in animals, then?” she asked, hopefully.

“I guess ...”

“Good, good. Write that down.” He did. She took a deep breath and continued, “Now think about that and about what kind of job you would like to do. Would you like to work indoors? Or maybe outdoors? Do you like helping people?”

“Helping people. I kinda like the sound of that. I like meeting new people and—”

“Good. Write that down,” she interrupted, cutting him off. “There are many fields that come to mind—farmhand, zookeeping, dog-catcher, pest control ...” She continued reeling off some jobs she thought James might have an aptitude for. But he had stopped paying attention, so she took her chance and moved off around the room in the vain hope of inspiring someone else.

James stared at the words ‘cryptids’ and ‘helping people’ sitting side by side on his page. He smirked, enjoying his little joke, but a spark had been kindled in his brain. He thought a little more and realised that he really would like to be a cryptid hunter, like those dudes on TV. That would be cool. Was it actually possible? Why not? Maybe there was something to this motivational bullshit after all. The kindling caught fire.

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The canteen was half empty at smoko. It seemed that nobody wanted to talk. James was sitting at his usual table when Marcus came in and sat down.

“How you going, dude? Are you inspired yet?” asked James.

“I started out okay,” he said, laughing. “I was seriously taking notes and then I looked down and saw that I had started drawing a dick.”

“You drew Mr Ivor?” asked James with mock seriousness.

“No. It was definitely a bellend,” Marcus responded.

“She made me feel the same way!” James’s mouth twitched.

“Yeah, but she already knew you were a dork after that crack about hookers and blackjack,” Marcus pointed out.

“I know, I couldn’t help myself.” James grinned.

“It was damn funny. Old Joe nearly fell off his chair!”

James wiped his eyes and stopped laughing. “Seriously though, I’ve had an idea.” He had been sitting on it with increasing excitement, and he couldn’t wait to tell Marcus. “Why don’t we do something together.”

“Like what?” Marcus replied, deadpan.

“We could become investigators,” James said dramatically, spreading his hands as though he was laying out a well-conceived plan.

Marcus looked at him and realised he was serious. “Investigators? What the hell made you think of that? We don’t know the first thing about investigating.”

“Not just any investigators, we could be paranormal investigators!” James was triumphant.

Marcus covered his mouth with his hand and stifled a laugh. “No, we couldn’t.”

James leaned forward in earnest. He was not going to be put off. “Why not? All we need to do is buy some gear, and we can set ourselves up.”

“Well, for one thing, that paranormal crap doesn’t exist,” replied Marcus in exasperation.

James sat back, he had been expecting this, and he had done some research. “Over half of the population of the UK thinks it does, and they are prepared to pay money to experience and investigate paranormal phenomena. You don’t have to believe in it.” He raised a finger for emphasis. “In fact, your scepticism adds credibility. We just need to investigate honestly. I’ve been reading some magazines about it, and I think we can set ourselves up quite easily. I know what equipment to buy and where to get it.”

“I’m impressed,” said Marcus with a straight face.

“Really?” James had expected Marcus to take the piss.

“Yeah,” Marcus said and laughed. “I didn’t know you could read!”

James snorted with laughter and got to his feet. “Think it over, dude. It would be a hell of a lot more fun than stacking shelves.”

You’ve got that right, Marcus thought as he stood up. *There is nothing left here*. As he headed for the door, the radio was playing ‘Ghost Town’ by The Specials. Marcus smiled

grimly and looked around the almost empty room. That's what this place was going to become.

* * *

A few days later, from the corner booth of the Urban Bean Café, Marcus sat drearily watching the rain beat against the windows. It was Monday morning and James was supposed to meet him here, but as usual, he was late.

"Hey, Marcus! Aren't you usually at work on a Monday?" A familiar female voice brought him out of his rain trance. He looked around in surprise.

"Oh, hi Zhan. Was that a joke? Or have you seriously not heard?" News usually spread fast around the village, especially bad news.

"I've been out of town at a convention. So what'd I miss?" With a rustle of lace and cotton, she plonked herself down beside him in the booth. Marcus shuffled over and noticed she was wearing red tights under a pale green skirt made of layered material, and a dark coat over her top. He smiled. No one else would be able to get away with an outfit like hers. Today her dark hair, shot through with hot-pink highlights, was done up in pigtails, but tomorrow she could be bald with only a topknot of hair. Yet, somehow, she would still look great. Her deep brown eyes and warm, golden skin tone gave her an exotic look that suited so many styles.

He had known Suzhanna for years. They had met at university where she was studying arts and theatre. He had dropped out after a year, but she had graduated and now taught drama and music at the local primary school. It was a great part-time job, one that allowed her to be as zany as she liked because the kids loved it, as did their parents. That was a good thing because by night she was a LARPer and cosplayer, so being weird came with the territory. She supplemented her income undertaking costume commissions. Anything from anime cat-girl ensembles to suits of armour for Renaissance fairs. Zhan had a knack for making anything out of anything, and she was damned good at it. Her handcrafted costumes were highly sought after.

Marcus looked at her again and smiled. He was a tiny bit envious of her. Zhan had always been so certain of her path in life and did exactly what she wanted. There was a focused energy about her; she was full of drive and determination, but without being obsessive. She remained the same kind and generous person that he had known at uni.

“Whitely’s is modernising and all of us workaday shlubs got canned ...” he began, cynically making air quotes around the word ‘modernising’.

“Hah!” Zhan laughed, but then seeing he wasn’t joking, quickly adopted her most crestfallen expression. “Oh, hey man, I’m sorry. Did you get a big fat cheque? Please tell me you got a big fat cheque.”

“Yeah, there were payouts. It’s pretty decent.”

“Well, great!” She beamed. “You hated that job anyway. Now’s your chance to do something that you’ll enjoy.”

“Yeah,” he said, sighing. “Actually, that’s why I’m here. I’m waiting for James. He’s had an idea and we are meeting to discuss it.”

“Woah!” Zhan gasped, waving her hands frantically as though she was trying to divert a runaway horse. “Woah, woah, woah, woah. James has had an idea? Every time I’ve met him, he’s had only two ideas in his head, one of which always involved me in a bikini!”

“Yeah, he’s told me about that idea.” Marcus laughed. “But no, this one might actually work.”

“Oh, I’m so sticking around to hear this.” She settled back into the cushion with an expectant look on her face.

At that moment, James walked round the corner and into the café. Marcus waved to catch his eye. Noticing Zhan, he smiled broadly. Self-consciously straightening up, he walked jauntily over to their booth.

“Hi Zhan!” he said excitedly. “How have you been?”

“Better than you guys by the sounds of it,” she replied.

James groaned. “Yeah, it sucks alright.”

“But Marcus tells me you have a plan,” she said, nodding encouragingly.

“I had this idea that we could get into paranormal investigations,” James said as he sat down. He couldn’t keep the excitement out of his voice.

Zhan smiled slightly but managed to keep her composure. “Are you serious?” she asked.

“Sure, why not?” James continued with enthusiasm. “More than half the population believes in the paranormal, and there are thousands of reports from all over the country that could be investigated, including here in Kent.”

“Yeah, but don’t you have to know what you are doing?” Zhan asked, doubt creeping into her voice. She was used to James’s half-baked ideas and suspected he had not thought it through.

James shook his head. “There’s not that much to know. The whole field is evolving and while there are various theories about what is going on all over the world, the idea is to use the available equipment to investigate and try to figure out what is happening in any particular place.”

“What sort of equipment?” she asked.

“Cameras, night-vision gear, motion sensors, EMF meters.” James was doing his best to sound like he knew what he was talking about.

Zhan nodded, trying not to appear doubtful. “Sounds cool. What’s an EMF meter?”

“It’s a handheld gadget that measures electromagnetic fields.” He mimed holding the device and waving it around. “The theory is that ghosts use the fields to manifest themselves, so if the meter’s reading suddenly spikes, you might have a spook.”

“Or some exposed wiring,” interjected Marcus.

“Or some wiring,” replied James, slowly rolling his eyes. “That’s why you have to investigate honestly. Fortunately, some EMF meters can be optimised for the electromagnetic radiation put out by everyday appliances and wiring, so that you can find the source of the reading more easily.”

“What if you don’t find anything?” asked Zhan.

“Actually, that’s why this might just work,” Marcus butted in. “There are many people who believe in this sort of thing, and they all hope to get some real evidence for its existence, but they don’t realistically expect to find it. They know it’s a long shot, but they want to have a go, and they are prepared to pay for that experience.”

“Is the gear expensive?” Zhan asked.

“It can be,” replied James. “The real flash stuff is, but we would start out small to see what demand there is, and what we need shouldn’t be too dear. The equipment all comes with instructions, so it ought to be easy enough to operate. I figure we should find a couple of likely-looking places and test it all out before we do our first investigation.”

“I’ve had an idea about that too,” said Marcus. “You know about the old manor up the road, right?” The others nodded.

“It’s a listed building, some sort of historic pile that’s being restored.” He leaned forward, drawing them in. “Nobody lives there anymore, so there’s a group of trustees overseeing the work and my dad’s on the board.”

“That figures,” interjected James, pushing up the tip of his nose with his finger and doing his best upper-class twit expression.

Zhan giggled.

“Well,” Marcus continued determinedly, trying not to look at him. “These projects are always underfunded, and it turns out they are short of money, so I think I can convince them to let us run ghost tours through the parts of the manor that are not being rebuilt. It will help raise the public profile and bring in investment and tourists.”

“It’s always *who* you know, isn’t it,” said James with a sly grin, gently mocking Marcus’s middle-class upbringing.

“Do you want the gig or not?” Marcus asked impatiently. He recognised the wind-up and chose to ignore it.

James laughed. “Yeah, I want the gig!”

“Are there actually any ghosts there?” asked Zhan.

“There must be,” replied James.

“The place is ancient,” continued Marcus, warming to the theme. “I don’t know a lot about it, but my dad has all the guff. I remember him telling me that it has been rebuilt several times. There was a fire at some point, but there’s been a manor house on that spot for hundreds of years. Bits of it might date back to medieval times. Apparently, there used to be a chapel, which is where the name Boughton Chapel comes from, so there might still be graves. Oh, and there is a ruined stone monument nearby. Hoofing great stones that are probably thousands of years old.”

“Like Stonehenge? I love those sorts of places,” Zhan whispered.

“Yeah, only much smaller.” He shook his head. “Just two upright stones with a really big one across the top.”

“It would be great to have a walk around that place and try out the gear,” James suggested.

“Can I come?” Zhan asked. “I could wear period costume. It might make the ghosts feel at home.”

“Hell yes!” blurted James. *The manor is a really good idea*, he thought. He hadn’t got as far as thinking about where they might start. *Good old Marcus. He’s really come through on this idea. Even Zhan thinks it might work.*