

DAN SMITH

THE CREATURES OF KILBURN MINE



Illustrated by
Chris King

Praise for the Crooked Oak series ...

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THE CREATURES OF
KILLBURN
MINE

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The Invasion of Crooked Oak

The Beast of Harwood Forest

The Horror of Dunwick Farm

The Terror of Hilltop House

THE CREATURES OF
**KILLBURN
MINE**

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For all the Crooked Oak fans!

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CHAPTER 1

UFO

Pete Brundle was one of the few people in Crooked Oak to see the strange light in the sky. He had woken from a bad dream about his mum and checked his phone for the time. It was five o'clock in the morning.

He turned over and closed his eyes, but he couldn't get back to sleep, so he climbed out of bed and wrapped his duvet around him like a cocoon. It was so cold in his bedroom that he could see his own breath as he crept over to the window and opened the curtains.

Outside, a layer of frost covered the cars parked on Campbell Street. It glimmered in the glow of the street lamps.

It was exactly nine minutes past five when a bright light shone in the sky, as if a star had suddenly appeared from nowhere. But Pete knew it wasn't a star.

It was something far more exciting.

*

“It was a UFO,” Pete told his best friends later that morning. “Aliens.”

He was standing by the bike racks at Crooked Oak Academy, wearing his thick coat. His best friends, Nancy and Krish, were wrapped up too. Temperatures had been below zero all week.

“It came across the sky like this,” Pete said. He raised a gloved hand and made an arc above

his head. “It got brighter as it came down, and it had this glow behind it, like a tail.”

“Then what?” Nancy asked. The tip of her nose had turned red from the cold.

“Then it went behind the houses and disappeared,” Pete said, dropping his hand. “It was a UFO. An Unidentified Flying Object.”

“We know what UFO stands for,” Krish said. He was struggling to padlock his bike to the rack. His thick gloves made it difficult.

“Aliens,” Pete insisted. “They’ve come to suck out our brains.”

“There’s no such thing as aliens,” Krish told him, finally clicking the padlock shut. “And they wouldn’t want to suck out your brains anyway – it wouldn’t be worth it. No, you saw a shooting star. I see them all the time.”

“But this was different,” Pete argued. “It was so bright. And it was *big*.”

Krish adjusted his glasses and gave Pete his “I know better” look.

“You saw a shooting star,” Krish repeated. “A tiny speck of space dust. Nothing more.”

Krish was the second smartest kid in Year Eight, and there was no point in arguing with him. The only person who could do that was Nancy, the *actual* smartest kid in Year Eight.

“Did I just hear you say you saw a shooting star last night?” said a voice, taking them by surprise.

They turned and saw their Physics teacher, Mr Bennings, standing behind them.

“Did it look anything like this?” Mr Bennings asked. He took his phone from his pocket and tapped the screen, showing them a

black-and-white video of a small front garden. At the top of the screen the sky was dark, so it was clearly taken at night. Then a light appeared in the sky. It flared like a firework and drifted in an arc towards the ground.

“Yeah, that looks like it,” Pete said. “But the one I saw was in colour, with a blue streak behind it and a bright red outline.”

“A meteorite,” Mr Bennings told Pete, putting his phone away. “A rock from space coming down to Earth. Did you know that scientists think meteorites could unlock the secrets of the universe? They believe they might have even been the start of *life on Earth*.” Mr Bennings whispered the last few words as if they were the most important secret in the world.

“Aliens,” Pete said, narrowing his eyes at Krish. “I told you.”

“You never know,” Mr Bennings replied. “That’s why we need to find meteorites as fast as possible and keep them safe by wrapping them in foil or plastic. Otherwise, they become contaminated and the information we get from studying them is useless.”

“Amazing,” Krish said.

“There’s something even more amazing,” said Mr Bennings. “By my calculations, *this* meteorite might have landed somewhere near Potter’s Moor.”

“Potter’s Moor?” Nancy said. “That’s just outside Crooked Oak.”

“Exactly,” Mr Bennings replied. He couldn’t hide his excitement. “The head teacher has given me special permission to leave school and go up there this afternoon to search for it. If I *do* find it, I’ll wrap it up and contact the UK Fireball Alliance, who will come to pick it up.

Just imagine! Maybe they'll even name it after me: 'The Bennings Meteorite'."

"That would be so cool," Krish said. "Finding an *actual* meteorite."

"Indeed!" Mr Bennings said. "Even better than seeing it fall from the sky!"