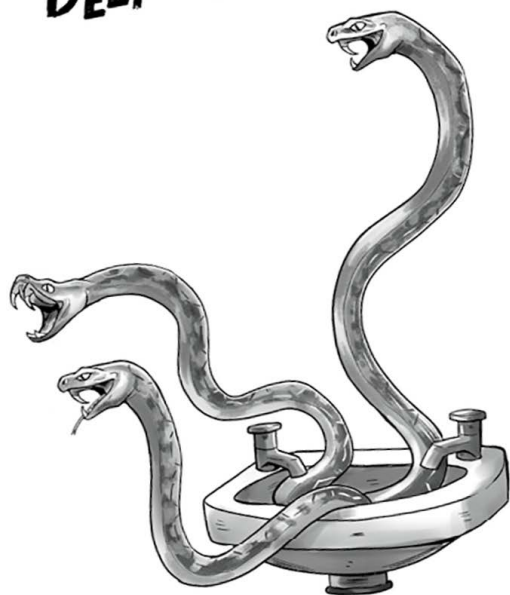


DEAD YARD

DEEP TROUBLE



To my husband, my most captive audience and biggest dream supporter.

PJK

*To the future artists and filmmakers. If you are afraid of creating ideas
inspired by your culture, let this book be the proof that your
work can make it. Let your creativity take the lead.*

MJ

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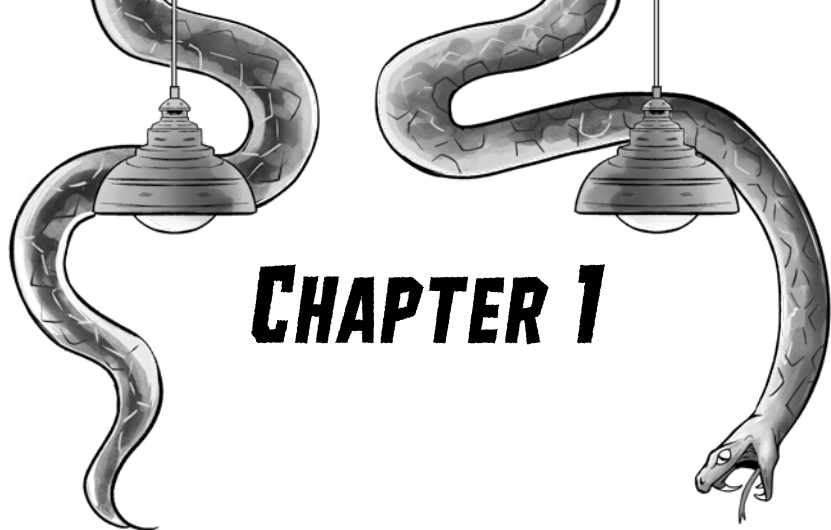


DEAD YARD

DEEP TROUBLE

LITTLE TIGER

LONDON



CHAPTER 1

If you could get medals for running home, Jermaine would have more golds than Usain Bolt. Every day after school he'd shoot out of his chair, leaving his best friend Assad in the dust. If he were a cartoon character, he'd leave a Jermaine-shaped hole in the door of his last period's classroom – he was that eager to get home. But why? New episodes of his favourite anime? Mum's home-made Jamaican patties (that he'd only recently been able to face eating again)? Delivery of new props to intercept before Kayla borrowed them forever? Well, yes, all of that. But most importantly, the film school's summer programme acceptance emails were meant to be sent out this week!

Jermaine had submitted *Dead Yard*, the film he'd made over Easter, using his dad's email address as he didn't have one of his own. And seeing as his dad rudely wouldn't let him look in his inbox whenever he pleased, Jermaine had to rush home and ask his dad to do it in front of him.

Bursting through the front door, he kicked off his shoes like an extra in *Cobra Kai* and yelled, "Daaaaaaaaaad, are you home?"

Dad popped his head out of the living room, laughing. "Yes, JJ, and you don't need to yell the place down. You might think I'm ancient but my hearing is fine!"

Jermaine's dad, knowing how important this was to him, had made a point of working from home this week so they could be together as and when the fateful email arrived.

"Anything from the film school?" Jermaine asked, as if his life depended on it.

"Hmm, let's have a look." Dad moved like a sloth, with Jermaine practically pushing him back to his computer in the corner of the living room. Jermaine tossed his backpack on the couch while

Dad slowly clicked open his email. His large frame was blocking the screen.

“Oh... Oh, JJ. I’m sorry.”

Jermaine’s heart dropped. After everything he and his friends had gone through to get that footage, he hadn’t got in? He looked down at his feet, feeling despair rise in his chest...

“Sorry you’ll be so busy at summer school!”

Dad got to his feet, eyes wide and smiling brightly.

Jermaine stared, slack-jawed, as Dad bellowed with laughter. What sort of sick dad joke was this? But as he stared at the email on the screen, reading the words **CONGRATULATIONS**, the message sunk in.

“I got in...” Jermaine whispered, hardly daring to believe it.

“You got in!” Dad confirmed, giving him a big hug.

“I GOT IN!” he yelled, his chest full, his face aching from the biggest grin he’d ever made.

“Ahhh, you’d already read the email, hadn’t you?

Don’t ever keep me hanging like that again!”

Jermaine playfully pushed his chuckling dad.

“What’s all this carrying on?” Mum and Kayla wandered into the living room. His sister was in her school uniform. Mum must have just picked her up.

“I made the film school summer prograaaaame!” Jermaine sang as he and his dad danced around the living room. Mum gasped and moved towards the screen to get a better look at the email.

“Your immersive effects and vivid storytelling of a haunted Caribbean wake stole the show,” she read out loud. “The final battle between good and evil was riveting, and we particularly liked the shaky cam effect from your handheld camera. We would be delighted to have you on our course. Well done, JJ!”

Jermaine’s smile grew strained, feelings of guilt seeping through. Technically it wasn’t his film-making prowess that got him the footage for his entry; he’d got it completely by chance. Had Miss Nell not planted the cassava seed, causing an evil spirit called the Ole Higue to haunt Shepherd’s Bush, he would have had very little footage for the final product! The shaky cam wasn’t even a creative choice – he’d just been so scared that his hand couldn’t remain steady while filming! He didn’t

create the story, it had just happened to him and his friends. It really made him question whether he was the creative genius he wanted to become, like the greats he idolised.

He must have had an uncertain look on his face because his dad put a gentle hand on his shoulder, kneeling down so he was eye level with Jermaine. “Hey, you deserve this! You worked really hard on the project and the judges clearly saw that, or else they wouldn’t have given you this opportunity. Now you get to knock the ball right out of the park!”

Jermaine nodded. “Thanks, Dad.” He smiled, trying to be more optimistic. This was the opportunity he wanted to show what he could do. But how would he ever be able to make something like *Dead Yard* again without real monsters? He couldn’t create effects like that for real! He’d have to work doubly hard to prove himself.

“Congrats, Germmy! If you ever need an agent, I only charge twenty per cent commission!” Kayla laughed, giving him a friendly punch in the arm, snapping him out of his thoughts.

“Talk business later, K,” Dad laughed, skipping

to another tab on his web browser. “I got us tickets to a film festival on the South Bank to celebrate. Who’s up for a trip to the city tomorrow?”

Jermaine’s spirits lifted. A film festival would be the perfect way to get new inspiration. His parents always had a way of choosing stuff for them to do as a family that showed they really backed their kids. It was sweet. He didn’t say anything but he even washed the dishes after dinner, though it was Kayla’s turn. He texted all his friends, both in his close friends group chat and in the casting group chat he had with the kids who normally took part in his films. The congratulations flooded in.

Well done!

Good on you, fam!

Black Panther 3 when?? <3

As the celebratory memes and voice notes rolled in, Jermaine knew he’d struggle to sleep that night, his mind already buzzing with anticipation. The messages from his closest friends meant the most.

Annette: As if there was a chance you wouldn't get in! 🐸🐸🐸🐸🐸.

Assad: They would have been mad not to take you.

Assad followed up with a gif of a wrestler doing a thumbs up.

Thanks, lads, Jermaine bashfully typed his reply. He wondered how good the other kids on the film school summer programme would be. How would his vision and talent compare? The anxious thoughts kept him awake for a while. But he eventually fell asleep, determined to do whatever it took to fulfil his dream of being the next great director.



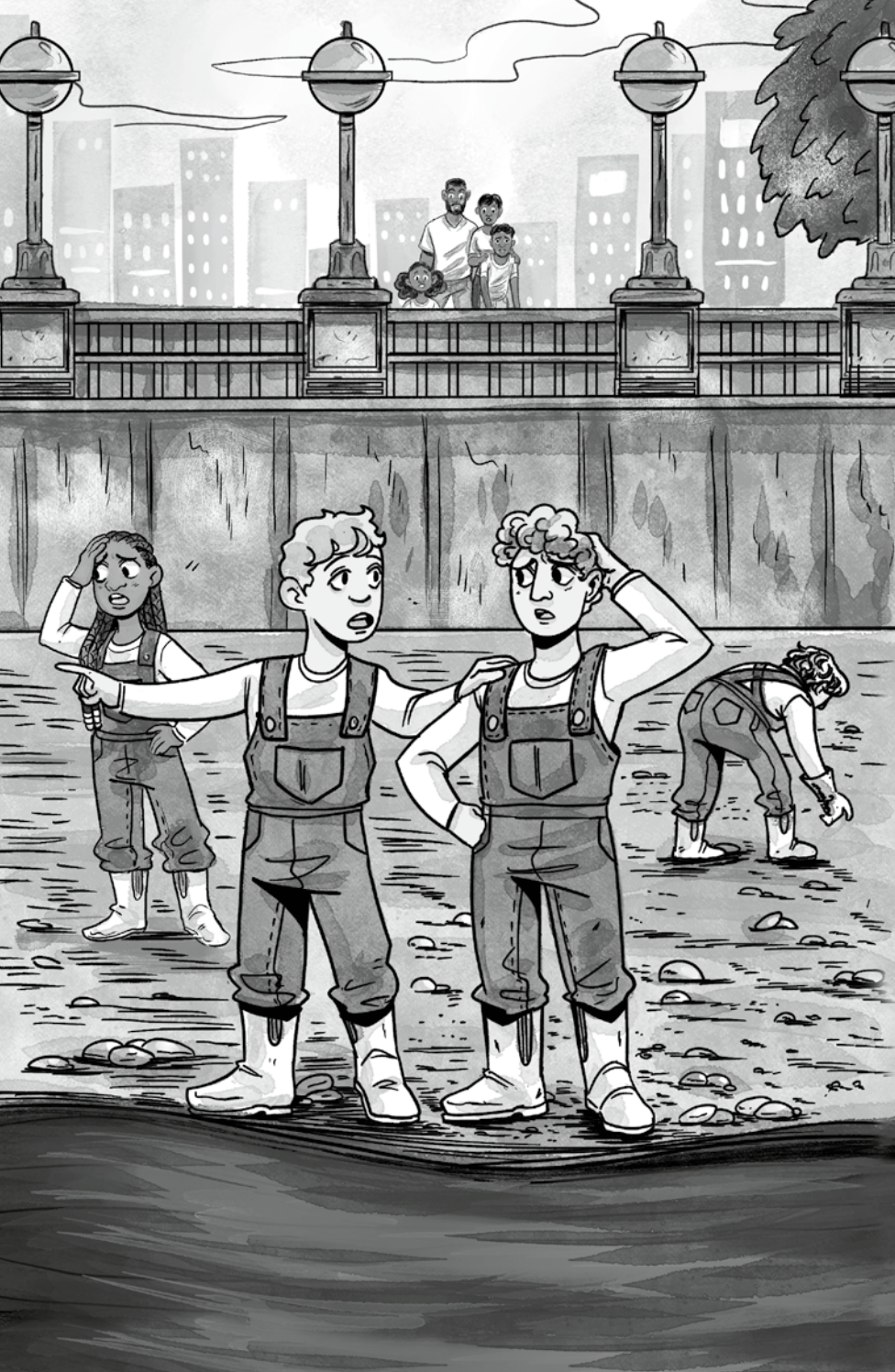
The following day Jermaine woke up bright and early and was ready way before the rest of the family. He was so excited to get to the festival that he was almost pushing his mum, dad and sister out the door to get down to BFI Southbank.

He was particularly looking forward to all the

indie fright night films (horror was still OK when it wasn't happening to him). Kayla might need to go with Dad or Mum and watch something else though as she was a bit young, not that she acted it.

Jermaine and his family wandered along the busy South Bank beside the river, deep in conversation, until a crowd of onlookers near the shoreline caught their attention. Jermaine looked over the barrier at the murky River Thames below. The tide was low, revealing the sandy riverbed where a group of people dressed in overalls and wellies were searching for something. Jermaine recognised the distinctive braids and coloured beads of one of the people down there. Saffron was a classmate of his, and had Jamaican heritage too. In fact, Saffron was a lot more knowledgeable about their culture than he was, and went to Jamaica every other summer.

“Saffron! You all right, yeah?” Jermaine called out, waving. Saffron looked up and waved back with a bright gap-toothed smile. She carefully made her way over the slippery sand and towards the stone steps where they met up.



“Blessings, Jermaine. That’s one strong, positive aura you’ve got today.” Saffron was into crystals and healing and being ‘in touch with the ancestors’ – which Jermaine used to find a bit weird up until his own great-great-uncle Carl’s ghost haunted him at the dead yard!

“That’s cos we’re going to a film festival. Can’t wait!”

“Oh my gosh! Is your film showing?” Saffron gawped. “I loved *Dead Yard*! You’re so creative.”

Jermaine’s discomfort bubbled beneath the surface again. More praise he didn’t deserve. “Um, no, ha ha. Not me. Just other short films.” He quickly changed the topic. “What are you doing down there? Everything OK?”

“Oh, my group does a weekly Thames clean-up,” she explained, pointing at the other people with her. “But apparently three kids who were beachcombing out here have just ... vanished. Has to be a prank, I reckon. They’re probably livestreaming this hoax as we speak.”

“Like vanished how, though?” Jermaine asked.

“Well ...” Saffron pointed down to the sand. “See for yourself.”

He looked over her shoulder where, sure enough, there were abandoned kid-sized shovels and brightly coloured buckets left lying on the ground. Footprints came to an abrupt stop halfway across the mud, as if they'd been simply plucked out of the air. All that was left was the gentle lapping of the river against the shore. It usually would have been a calming sight, but now it seemed sinister, like the tide had come in and dragged all three kids off into the deep. Saff was right, it had to be a prank. A pretty good one, mind!

"No one saw them go into the water or walk away. I don't know how they did it!" Saffron continued.

"You kids sure do get creative with your jokes these days," said Mum as she came over with Dad and Kayla. "I'm sure they'll turn up. We'd better get a move on. We were already a bit late because someone forgot to iron his shirt."

"The shade!" said Dad, clutching his non-existent pearls.

Saffron laughed. "Well, I hope you all have fun at the festival. See you at school on Monday,

Jermaine?” He nodded and she left, rejoining her group near the water.

Jermaine’s parents ushered him and Kayla onwards to the festival, but Jermaine was still doing mental gymnastics trying to figure out exactly how those kids might have pranked everyone with their footprint trick. Walking backwards to leave those prints, maybe? But then how would three kids doing that in plain sight have gone unnoticed?

*“Come, chile, wander into the deep,
for favour and fortune, the dreams that you seek.”*

A musical voice cut through Jermaine’s thoughts, and he whipped round. It had sounded as if someone were whispering in his ear, but there was no one behind him.

“Did you hear that?” Jermaine asked his family, who looked at him, confused.

“Hear what?” Mum asked.

“That ... that singing.”

Jermaine turned his head, wondering where a voice so sweet could have come from. It seemed to echo from everywhere and nowhere at once! Kayla raised an eyebrow while Dad scratched at

his head, looking like he was trying to find a polite way of asking if he was losing it.

“Probably a busker.” Mum shrugged. “Now do you want to see these films or not? Hurry up!”

Jermaine grimaced. Was this going to be a repeat of Uncle Carl’s dead yard? He checked his surroundings, searching for a duppy, seeing nothing but the gently swirling Thames. He could feel a chill settling on his skin – what was going on? He hadn’t imagined that voice. Had he?